

Semi-Monthly

No.

THE

187

DIME

CLAWS' PLOT;

OR,

ALONE ON THE PLAINS.

BY EDWARD WILLETT,

Author of the following Dime Novels:

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NEW YORK:

BEADLE AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS,

98 WILLIAM STREET.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1869, by
BEADLE AND COMPANY,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
Southern District of New York.

(No. 187.)

THE OUTLAWS' PLOT.

CHAPTER I.

LEFT ALONE.

IN the month of June, 18—, a caravan was on its way from the western border of Missouri to Santa Fé, in New Mexico. At the head of the caravan—at the same time its leader and principal proprietor—was Walter Bligh, the chief personage who is to figure in the following pages.

Walter Bligh was a Missourian by birth. Left an orphan at an early age, he had been taken in charge by an uncle, a fur-trader, who had given him a good education, and had subsequently employed him in his business. In the capacity of clerk and agent, young Bligh had made several journeys to the Rocky Mountain region, in the course of which he had not only acquired a knowledge of hunting and trapping and Indian life and customs, but had become deeply imbued with a love of the wilderness and a spirit of adventure.

When he was twenty-five years of age, his uncle died, leaving him a considerable fortune. About half of this he soon invested in goods suitable for the Indian and Mexican trade, which he placed in wagons, and set out with them for Santa Fé. Besides the goods, he had in one of the wagons, quite a sum of money in coin, which he carried for the purpose of paying Mexican duties and defraying the expenses of the journey. He was, at this time, a tall and fine-looking young man, with dark hair and piercing black eyes, active and athletic in person, of a commanding figure and countenance, skilled in the use of all weapons, and at the same time daring and cautious.

The guide and leader of the caravan, under Bligh, was

William Beeler, a mountain-man of great experience and reputation, who had spent the greater portion of his life in the wilderness, and who was fully competent to take charge of such an expedition. He was forty-five years old, tall, sinewy and weather-beaten, well versed in all the ways and wiles of the savages, a skilled and hardened Indian-fighter, and a man who feared, as was often said, neither God, man, nor the devil. There was a cast of brutality in his nature, if not actual ferocity, which made him, at times, an unpleasant companion; but he was invaluable to guide and take charge of a caravan, and Walter Bligh, who had long known him, had thought himself lucky in obtaining his services.

The next in position and authority was Simon Leonard, a cosmopolitan—a man of the world—from nowhere in particular, but equally at home in all places. He was neither tall nor short, neither stout nor lean—a man of medium size and medium qualities. He was good-looking, but not prepossessing in appearance, as his eyes were small and set near together, and the expression of his countenance, though pleasing at times, was never frank or open. He had received a fair education, had been trained to business, and was remarkable for the neatness of his attire, if not for its elegance. He was known to be a professional gambler, and it was said that he had killed a man in a duel; but saints were unknown among the men of the mountains and the prairies, and the moral character of a man was never inquired into, if he was able to perform the duties that were required of him, and willing to undergo the toils and privations of wilderness life. Leonard was about ten years younger than Beeler, and had been employed by Walter Bligh as a clerk and general agent. Both of these men, also, had small shares in the expedition.

Another employee was Charles Simbell, a young man of nineteen, an orphan, in whom Walter Bligh had taken an interest, and whom he had brought with him for the purpose of educating and training him. Charlie, as he was generally called, was an active and intelligent youth, who appeared to be entirely devoted to his friend and preceptor.

There were three other men connected with the caravan, in the capacity of teamsters—Robert Yark, a Missourian; Timothy Taplin, a Yankee; and Richard Le Breux, a Canadian

half-breed. These were able-bodied, vigorous men, inured to hardships, and good representatives of the classes from which they sprung.

All the members of the party—with the exception of Sim Leonard, who clung to the garments of civilization—were dressed in hunters' style, with hunting-shirts, leggings, moccasins, and blankets, and all were well mounted, armed and equipped.

The caravan had crossed the Arkansas river, and was proceeding toward the Cimarron, when a plot was developed and carried into effect, which had been matured during the early stages of the journey, if not before its commencement.

The leaders of the plot were Bill Beeler, the guide, and Sim Leonard, the clerk, and its object was nothing less than to take possession of the caravan, to murder its rightful owner, and to divide the plunder among themselves.

These men well knew the value of the property which Walter Bligh was taking to the south, and they also knew that he had a sum of money in one of the wagons, locked up in a tin box. The goods, as they were well aware, would be doubled or trebled in value when they reached the Mexican territory, and they saw no reason why they should not possess themselves of the small fortune that would be the result of the journey.

If they had not joined the caravan for the purpose of committing this crime, they had formed the plot soon after their departure from Missouri, and every thing was in readiness, before they crossed the Arkansas, to carry it into execution.

Leonard, who was the chief of the conspirators, had easily persuaded the three teamsters to join them in this nefarious enterprise. The Yankee was seduced by greed of gain; the half-breed, whose ideas of honesty were only such as he had derived from intercourse with the Indians, was only too glad of the chance to make such a grand *coup*; and the Missourian was completely dazzled and overcome by the picture which the gambler presented to him, of the life of indolence, luxury and debauchery that he could lead, when he should come in possession of his share of the plunder. The only difficulty was with the boy, Charlie Simbell, whose devotion to Bligh was so well known, that it required all Leonard's

caution and tact to approach him. When the proposition was first made to him, he recoiled from it with horror, as the gambler had expected, and declared his intention of immediately reporting the plot to his friend. Threats, however, accomplished the effect which other arguments had failed to produce. When the youth saw that all the other members of the party were concerned in the plot, and when he was assured by them that a horrible death would be his fate if he should refuse to join them, his fortitude was not sufficient to sustain him, and he painfully consented to the murder and robbery of his kind and trusting friend.

South of the Arkansas, the route of the caravan lay through a barren and desert region, without trees or water, covered only with the artemisia, or wild sage. This plain, also, was destitute of buffalo, and game of other kinds was almost equally scarce.

The third night after leaving the Arkansas, the caravan encamped as usual, and Beeler was set to watch, as it was his turn to stand guard. Near the middle of the night, when Bligh and Charlie Simbell were sound asleep, Leonard arose, followed by the Yankee and the Missourian, and stepped silently to the spot where the sentry was standing. The four men then went behind one of the wagons, where they seated themselves on the ground.

"Wal, squire," said the guide, after they had sat in silence for a few minutes; "you've come out here fur su'thin' I reckon. Do you allow that the time has come?"

"Yes," replied Leonard. "There may be other places that would suit our purpose as well as this; but we will find none that are better. We ought to finish the business now, and then it will be over with, and we will come into possession of our property."

"That's jest my notion. We've been kep' out of that thar property too long a'ready, and it's time fur us to be gittin' our own. I vote that we do the job right now. What say you all?"

"I say yes," replied Robert Yark. "The quicker it's done, the better this coon will be suited. I want to git hold of the property, and see what it amounts to. I want to know how long my sheer is gwine to last me."

"You'll find the pile to be big enough, if you take keer of it," said the Yankee. "I've been lookin' araound, and makin' a calkilation, and it foots up a 'tarnal good total. Naow's the time to claim it, 'cordin' to my notion."

"As we are all agreed," said Beeler, "we had better go right ahead. How about the boy, squire? Do you think he will make any fuss?"

"I don't believe he will dare to," replied Leonard. "We have scared him pretty well, and he begins to see which side of his bread is buttered."

"Countin' in the boy, will make six tew divide the property among," suggested Taplin. "What would yew fellers saw tew gittin' rid of him and his sheer at the same time? He ain't willin' tew go in with us, anyhaow, and who knows but he might peach?"

"You need give yourself no trouble about him. His share will not be enough to hurt any of you. I will look after him, and will see to it that he don't peach. If he should, what harm could it do? Where is the law that could touch us?"

"Sim is right about that," said Beeler. "It ain't wuth while to harm the boy. It's onderstood that we are to divide all the property among us, sheer and sheer alike, countin' out what belongs to the squire and me a'ready. We will go on to Santa Fé, or to Chihuahua, wharever we kin trade best. Thar we will sell out the truck, and divide the cash. As that is settled, all we've got to do is to go ahead. In the fust place, we must git rid of the man who has been keepin' us out of our property, and I reckon we had better toss up among us, to see who shell take the job of knockin' him in the head."

"I have thought of a better plan," said Leonard. "We need not shed any blood, and we may as well have that off our hands."

"What shall we do, then?"

"Just leave him here. We could say that he got lost, and no man could say that we killed him. I wouldn't give a picayune for his chance of living until he could get to a settlement."

"Thunder! You're a cool one, squire. You mean to set him afoot, I reckon, and leave him nothin'."

"Of course I do."

"This child had rather be killed, by a long sight. That would be the mercifullest way; but t'other mought be the best fur us, and we've got ourselves to look arter. You must hev some kind of a grudge ag'inst him, Sim."

"I have. I was about to marry a rich widow in St. Louis; but he told her something that ruined my chances. He don't know that I found out who put that spider in my dumpling; but I have remmembered it against him."

"Wal; it's all one to this child, so that we git the property. We will hev to tie him afore we start, and, as he allus goes armed, we had better ketch him while he is asleep. I and Bob will 'tend to that job, squire. All we will ask of you, will be to do the talkin' when he begins to blate."

Beeler and Yark lighted their pipes, and proceeded to smoke, as unconcernedly as if they had no such infernal business on hand. The others quietly returned to the camp, and lay down.

Just before dawn, when Walter Bligh, wrapped in his blanket, was sleeping peacefully, with nothing but pleasant dreams to disturb his slumbers, he was suddenly awakened by a rude grasp that was laid on his shoulder.

Starting up, he found himself in the presence and power of Beeler and Robert Yark, who had seized him, and were about to pinion his arms with a rope.

His muscular strength and activity were extraordinary in a person of his age and size, and he struggled violently to free himself from his assailants. He had nearly succeeded in doing so, when they were reinforced by Leonard, who tied his hands while he was held by the others.

While this operation was being performed, Le Breux, the half-breed, who had not been present at the council, owing to an overdose of alcohol, came up to the scene, followed by the Yankee and Charlie Simbell. The half-breed had surreptitiously tapped a keg of spirits, the day before, in one of the wagons, and had become outrageously drunk. When his misdemeanor was discovered, his supplies had been shut off, and he was suffering from the reaction of the fiery stimulus. Taplin looked as if, while desirous of avoiding all responsibility, his curiosity had compelled him to come and see that

the "job" was well done. The boy appeared to be bewildered and frightened, sympathizing with his friend, but fearing to assist him; anxious to slink away, but impelled to remain and witness the outrage.

Walter Bligh stood up before them, panting, and nearly exhausted by his struggles; but fearless and defiant.

"Well, my men," he said, when he had recovered his breath. "I would like to know what you mean by this. Is it a joke, or do you intend to kill me?"

"It is not a joke, and we do not intend to kill you," replied Leonard. "We shall simply leave you alone. If you kill yourself, it is none of our business."

"Still I do not understand you. It is a conspiracy, of course; but I would like to know the object of it."

"It's as plain as a buffler trail, cap," said Beeler. "The fact is, that we think this here caravan belongs to us, and that you've been keepin' us out of our property too long a'ready. We're a-gwine to take it now, and we shall drap you right here."

"You mean, then, to rob me, and to leave me to perish here on the prairie."

"Don't call hard names, cap. We hain't hurt ye; but we mought be tempted to do it."

"It would be more merciful to kill me, than to set me afoot in this desolate region, where I must surely die of starvation. Sim Leonard, I have lent you money, and have tried to be a friend to you. Is it in this way that you repay me?"

"It is in this way," replied the gambler, with a sneer, "that I repay you for your friendship in the matter of the widow Labrache. When she had promised to marry me, you broke up the game by telling her that I was a gambler and a dissipated character."

"It is true. She was a very estimable lady, and I wished to save her from you. Have I ever harmed *you*, Beeler? I have frequently employed you, have always paid you well, and have given you a venture in this trip. Why should you wish to illtreat me?"

"I hain't got nothin' ag'in you, cap; but I want my sheer of this property, and I mean to hev it."

"Robert Yark, I nursed you when you were sick, and was

a friend to you when you had no one to care for you. Do you mean to desert me now?"

"Talk's cheap, cap," replied the Missourian; "but this coon may never git sech another chance to live easy, and he don't mean to let it slip."

"Taplin, I took you from the St. Louis sharks. I paid your debts, clothed you, and gave you employment. Is this your gratitude?"

"I ain't a-doin' nothin' tew yew, I calkilate," muttered the Yankee.

"Richard Le Breux, if it had not been for me, you would now have been lying in jail. You swore that you would always be a faithful friend to me, if I would procure your release. Is this the way you keep your promise?"

"Plenty whisky after you gone," replied the half-breed, with a drunken leer.

"Charlie Simbell, is it possible that you can look on and see this thing done? You are an orphan, and you have had none but me to care for you since your mother died. I have supported you and educated you, and I have meant to give you a business training and a chance to make your fortune. Is it possible that you can turn against me?"

The boy was about to speak; but Leonard gave him a look, which caused him to hold down his head and slink away in silence.

"We have had talk enough, and more than enough," said Leonard.

"Search him, Bill. Take every thing away from him, and then tie his legs."

Walter Bligh, seeing no help for it, submitted quietly to the searching and tying. Even his pocket-knife was taken from him, and he was left, bound hand and foot, while the conspirators proceeded to cook and eat their breakfast. Leonard brought him a little meat and bread, which he threw upon the ground by his side, telling him that he had better make the most of it, as it would be all he would get in this world. They then hitched up the teams, and the caravan started on its way, leaving him alone in the desert.

As the robbers were leaving, he rose to his feet with an effort, and called after them.

"You have not seen the last of this," he shouted. "You had better come back and finish me; for I shall live through it if you don't. Something tells me that I will live through it, and I will live to be revenged on every one of you."

A jeering laugh came back across the plain, and he was left alone.

CHAPTER II.

THE PHANTOM LAKE.

WHEN Walter Bligh said that something told him that he should live through his peril, he spoke as he felt. Like the Indian captive at the stake, who endeavors to exasperate his tormentors into dealing a blow that will put an end to his sufferings, he had hoped that he might frighten the ruthless conspirators, so that they might be persuaded to come back and kill him. Although his sufferings had not yet begun, he knew well what they must be, and he felt that it would be much easier to die at once than to endure them.

But the despairing taunt had hardly escaped his lips, when a new hope sprung up in his breast. He had discovered that the rope with which his hands were bound had been so loosely and carelessly tied by Leonard, that it would be easy to free himself from it. It was a slight hope, giving him but the shadow of a chance for life; but it was something to know that he would be at liberty, that he would not be compelled to die without an effort. But this slender thread of hope was followed by a presentiment—a feeling of certainty—which told him that he was to survive the trial—that, whatever his dangers or sufferings might be, he would survive them, and live to avenge himself upon his unnatural enemies.

As soon as the caravan was out of hearing, and while it was yet within sight, he began to try to free his wrists from their bonds. It was a tedious task, as he was unable to use his fingers; but he loosened the knot by shaking it, by twisting it, and by rubbing and pushing it against the ground, until he was enabled to extricate one hand, and the rest of the work

was easy. Then the ropes were soon cast off, and he sprung to his feet, shouting for joy, just as the caravan disappeared in the distance, behind a swell of the prairie.

But his trouble was all before him still. He was free; but what was he to do? He might follow the caravan, and possibly overtake it; but it was certain that they who had left him to perish would not hesitate to complete their evil work, and he was unable to resist them. The only course left him was, to retrace his steps, until he should fall in with some white men, or reach some sort of a settlement; and that seemed utterly hopeless.

Bent's fort, on the Arkansas, was the nearest trading-post, and that was considerably more than a hundred miles away, by the most direct route. Game was so scarce and shy, that he knew it would be almost impossible to kill any if he possessed a rifle, and he was destitute of a weapon of any kind. How was he to support life during his journey?

Nothing daunted, as he felt confident that he would live to revenge himself upon his persecutors, he resolved to shape his course at once for Bent's, following no trail, but keeping the direction which he knew would lead him thither. A straight line to the fort, as he was well aware, would strike the headwaters of a creek, a branch of the Arkansas, where he would find water, and possibly fish.

As he thought of the fish, he picked up the ropes with which he had been bound, and put them in his pocket. He also picked up the bit of meat and piece of bread that Leonard had thrown to him, with all the remnants of the robbers' breakfast, and carefully laid them away for future use, resolving that he would not use them until he could obtain something to replace them, unless he should be driven to it by hunger.

After a brief pause for reflection, and with a last look at the track of the caravan, he struck out toward the north-west, shaping his course by the sun.

At noon time he was hungry, having eaten nothing that morning; but he restrained himself, and walked wearily on over the barren prairie, until night found him exhausted by traveling and lack of food. He then concluded to eat the scanty store that he had in his pocket, supposing that he would

reach the creek the next morning, when he hoped to be able to get some fish. After gnawing the bones, he laid down, with his hunger still unsatisfied, and slept unquietly, dreaming of vengeance on the wretches who had put him in such a plight.

He did not reach the creek until near noon the next day, and his hopes were at once overthrown, when he discovered it to be dry. Not despairing yet, he walked down the bed of the creek, until he found some little pools of water, in which he was glad to quench his thirst, as he had had nothing to drink since he was "set afoot."

Food, however, was more important than drink, and the creek was his only reliance for both. Encouraged by the little pools that he had found, he followed down the course of the stream for many miles, until he came to some larger pools, in which were a few minnows. Taking apart the bits of rope with which he had been tied, he twisted a fishing-line, and, with hooks made of pins, and grasshoppers for bait, he caught a number of the little fish. Making a fire in the Indian fashion, he cooked and ate them, and continued to do so until he had exhausted the pools. He then went further down the creek, and repeated the experiment.

This process he kept up until night, which found him so far down the stream that he had reached running water, and his appetite was still unappeased. He perceived that this plan would not support life for many days, much less carry him to his destination, and it was necessary to adopt some other course.

Finding the minnows more plentiful a little further down, he caught enough for his breakfast the next morning, and cooked and ate them. After breakfast he caught as many more as he could carry, filled his pockets with them, bade farewell to the creek, and set out across the prairie, in the hope of soon striking the Arkansas.

He had expected to reach the main river the second day after leaving the creek; but the close of that day found him still wandering on the prairie, with no river in sight. It must be, he thought, that he had mistaken his course, and had been traveling in the wrong direction. This reflection was enough to dishearten him; but he did not yet despair. Carefully

observing his bearings, he took a new departure, convinced that he could not fail to reach the river, if he should journey steadily toward the north. Once at the Arkansas, it would only be necessary to ascend the river, in order to arrive ultimately at Bent's.

He felt that it was very important to reach the river, as his provisions had again given out. The fish which he had put in his pocket had soon begun to spoil, and he had eaten them raw as he walked, rather than throw them away or stop to cook them. Thereafter he had no food except the grasshoppers and spiders that crossed his path over the prairie.

Whether from his meager diet, the quality of his food, the exhausted state of his physical nature, the excited condition of his mind, or all these causes preying upon him, he fell into a strange state. In fact, he was seized with delirium, and it was no wonder if he lost his bearings, and wandered aimlessly over the prairie. Still, he did not despair. It seemed as if he would never reach the river; but he pressed boldly and blindly on, buoyed up by the thought of revenge, vowing that he *would* live through it, and live for vengeance.

In his delirious moments he imagined that he was pursuing Sim Leonard and Beeler, the leaders of his traitorous and cruel enemies. They were enlarged into monstrous and shadowy beings, fleeing before him with giant strides; while he, a mere pigmy, was straining every nerve in pursuit, shouting across the desert for help that could never come. A stifling heat overpowered him; a leaden weight pressed upon his brain; his eyes were so dim and blurred that he gazed at the sun as if through smoked glass; the earth sunk beneath his steps, or rose in mountains before him; but he pushed on desperately, chasing the shadows that mocked him and grinned at him as they escaped from his grasp.

Thirst came next to torture him—a horrible, burning, parching, scorching, deathly thirst. He was on the shore of the Dead Sea, he fancied, and was lapping like a dog, in its asphaltic waters, which only served to make his craving more intolerable. His mouth was an oven, his throat was the entrance to the infernal pit, and his stomach was nothing less than the abode of the damned, a gulf of living fire and torment.

But such pains must have an end. There is a limit to human endurance, and Walter Bligh had nearly reached that limit, when new life was given to him by the sight of a sheet of water that stretched out before his eyes, broad, bright and beautiful, at no great distance. He had reason enough to know that it could not be the Arkansas, as it was too wide, and the water of the river could not be seen, at that season, until its bank was reached. He had never heard of a lake in that region; but there it was, plain before his eyes, and he would have the credit of the discovery. He knew a bright-eyed girl in St. Louis, who had often smiled pleasantly upon him, after whom he would name it, and her name would be written in the maps, and would go down to future ages. He had read of the mirage; but this could not be the mirage; there was no mistaking the cool and quiet glimmer of that water, or the forms of the stately trees that shaded the lake.

Soon he would reach it; soon his parched lips and burning throat would be cooled by the life-giving element, and his wearied limbs would be refreshed by a luxurious bath. He would find fish there, too, and he would stop at the lake long enough to recruit himself, and to lay in a stock of provisions that would last him until he should reach Bent's fort.

Hopefully and thankfully he pressed on, the two giant shadows, a little less shadowy then, leading the way; but the lake seemed to fly before him, although it was always in sight. When he had traveled a long distance, he was no nearer to it than when he first saw it. Feeling that he must indeed be ill, when he judged of distances so poorly, he pressed on yet more rapidly, though the sand seemed to be continually slipping from under his feet, and preventing him from making any progress.

At last the two phantoms grew larger, and were joined by other phantoms, until a crowd of gigantic creatures, men, women and horses, rose up before him, as if to hinder him from reaching the lake.

"Make way!" he shouted, as he rushed toward them with a desperate effort.

He fell prostrate on the prairie, and saw no more of the lake or the phantoms.

CHAPTER III.

A PROMISE.

WHEN Walter Bligh opened his eyes, there was no lake in sight, and the phantoms had disappeared. In their stead, he saw an old man, who was seated on the ground at his head, and a young woman, or grown girl, who was kneeling at his side. Three horses were picketed near them, two of which were saddled, and the third was covered with packs. The girl held a gourd canteen, from which the old man took water to moisten his fevered lips and his burning brow.

"He is alive, father!" joyfully exclaimed the girl, as Walter's eyelids unclosed themselves. "Give him a taste of brandy, and perhaps he can speak to us."

When the stimulus had been poured down his throat, Walter raised himself to a sitting posture, and gazed earnestly at his companions. His sight was still dim, and the heavy weight was yet upon his brain; but his senses were clear enough to tell him that the girl was beautiful, and that the old man, who had evidently been handsome in his younger days, wore a kindly, but mournful expression of countenance.

"What place is this?" he asked. "How did you happen to come here?"

"We saw you running across the prairie," replied the old man. "You were stumbling as you ran, and we rode up to see what was the matter with you; but you fell down before we could reach you."

"I suppose that Leonard and Beeler must have turned upon me and knocked me down. I was very foolish to chase them without any weapon. Do you know what became of them?"

"We have seen no one. You were alone on the prairie when we caught sight of you."

"It is strange. I was near a lake, and was hurrying to reach it; but I do not see it now."

"There was no lake, poor fellow! You were tempted by a mirage, no doubt. You have been very ill, and you have a hot fever now."

"Am I near the Arkansas? How far is it to Bent's?"

"You are nearly a hundred miles from either Bent's or the Arkansas. The Purgatory is but a short distance from here. You must have lost your way entirely."

"I know that I had, now. I had lost my mind, as well as my way, and I would have died if you had not come to my assistance. But I will live for vengeance."

Overcome by exhaustion, and by the thought of his lately perilous condition, the young man fell back in a swoon.

"He has fainted again!" exclaimed the girl. "What shall we do now?"

"He will soon revive, and then we will feed him and nurse him."

"And what shall we do with him then?"

"We must take him with us, I suppose."

"To Bent's?"

"You know that I will not go to Bent's if I can help it. We must take him to our home, and keep him there until he is well enough to travel."

"I am so glad!"

"Why so, Esther? Do you feel an interest in this young man?"

"Not such an interest as you mean, sir," replied the girl, with a blush; "but he is very ill and unfortunate, and—I am glad that you mean to take him home. But how will we carry him?"

"Easily enough, if you will watch by him for half an hour, until I return."

The girl readily consented to do so, and the old man mounted his horse, and rode toward the dark line of timber that marked the course of the Purgatory. He returned in a short time, bringing two long poles and some shorter sticks, with which he soon made a litter, separating the poles by lashing the sticks across them, at a distance of six feet apart. A blanket was securely fastened over the intervening space, leaving two shafts at each end of the conveyance. The girl's horse was fastened to the fore shafts, and the pack-horse to

the hind shafts. Walter Bligh, who had recovered his consciousness, and had partaken of a little more stimulus and some food, was then placed in the litter, the girl mounted her horse, and the party set forth, the old man riding by the side of the litter, with his rifle across his saddle-bow.

Walter Bligh accomplished that journey in a dream. He knew nothing of the direction in which he was taken, or of the distance that he traveled. He scarcely knew when a stoppage was made, or when the journey was resumed. At one time he had so far regained his strength, as he supposed, that he insisted upon leaving the litter and riding one of the horses; but the old man, who knew that his strength was only that of increasing fever, refused to allow him to do so, and was finally compelled to bind him.

When he began to have a clear perception of things—when his senses began to present to him forms as they were, and not as distorted by delirium—he found himself in what appeared to be a cave. He was sure it was a cave; for the walls were of solid rock, and he could make out the forms of stalactites that hung from the roof, while a huge stalagmite, of which the top had been broken off, served as a support for a round-table in the center. The room was a large one, and its furniture, rude as it was, indicated the presence of taste and an eye to comfort. The bed upon which he was lying was soft and pleasant; beautiful skins were hung against the walls, with specimens of braiding and other fancy work; a slow fire, doubtless to keep down the moisture, was burning in a corner; and stools and bundles of furs were arranged at the sides of the apartment.

But his attention was more strongly drawn to the living occupants of the cavern room. Of these there were two, besides himself. In the doorway stood an Indian, tall, stately and silent, and at the table in the center sat the girl whom he had seen upon the prairie.

The eyes of the Indian were fastened upon the girl, and, as Walter followed their direction, his own eyes became fixed upon her, and he saw how beautiful she was. There was nothing showy or startling in her beauty; but it was distinguished, on the contrary, for quietness and placidity, for regularity of features and an intelligent, amiable expression. She

had such a face as artists love to give to Saint Mary Magdalen. Her hair, which was dark and abundant, was banded and carried back into a coil, much in the fashion of the present day; she was dressed in a plain but tasteful calico pattern; and extreme neatness not only characterized her personal appearance, but pervaded every thing about her. As she sat by the round-table, quietly sewing, Bligh looked at her for a long time, as silent as the statuesque Indian, and was then tempted to address her.

"I need not ask how I came here," he said, "as I know that you and your father brought me here; but I will really be obliged to you if you will tell me where I am."

The girl, startled by the sound of his voice, turned pale and red by turns, and then stepped to the fire in the corner, from which she brought a tin cup, and gave it to him.

"Father told me that I must give you this tea as soon as your fever left you," she said. "Your fever has broke, and there is no more danger. Drink it all; it is only a soothing mixture."

Walter emptied the cup, and looked at her curiously as she resumed her seat.

"When I ask for information, you give me a draught," he said. "I ask you again, if you will have the kindness to tell me where I am."

"You are at our home—father's home and mine—as much as two hundred miles from where we found you. When you get a little better, you can walk out and see what sort of a place it is."

"Have I been sick a long time?"

"You have been here nearly two weeks, and during much of that time it has been doubtful whether you would live or die; but the danger is now passed."

"And who are you, besides my very kind friends and preservers? By what names may I call you, I mean?"

"Father's name is John Arnott, and I am Esther Arnott."

"Of what occupation is he?"

"Are you not a little inquisitive, sir? He is a hunter."

"It is strange that a man of such gentlemanly appearance and refined conversation, and such a lady as yourself, should be dwelling here in the wilderness."

"Stranger things have happened. It was strange to us that a man of your appearance should be wandering alone upon the prairie."

"True enough ; but I mean to explain it."

"You are not now strong enough. We have guessed at it, from what you revealed during your fever."

"I talked wildly, I suppose. Who is our red friend?"

"Arapaho!" exclaimed the Indian, striking his breast with his hand. "The Tall Pine is a warrior, and he is a friend of the Medicine Wolf and of Fawn-eye."

"He has been very kind to you in your sickness," said Esther. "I would warn you against talking too much ; but I know that you will not ask many more questions, if you finished your draught."

She spoke truly. In a few moments Walter Bligh felt himself overpowered by drowsiness, and after a few indistinct mutterings, he fell asleep.

He awoke refreshed, and thereafter his recovery was rapid. In a few days he was able to sit up and converse with Esther and her father. He told them his story, and received from them warm expressions of sympathy ; but when he mentioned the name of Sim Leonard, both were agitated by powerful emotions.

"It is not a very unusual name," said the old man, "but it may be the same person. What sort of a man in appearance was this Leonard?"

Bligh described the chief of the conspirators, and the description appeared to be recognized by both father and daughter.

"It is the same!" exclaimed Mr. Arnott, rising from his seat, his face flushed, and his whole form trembling as if with passion. "You shall be revenged, Mr Bligh. You shall have as deep a vengeance as you can desire. I will go with you, and—"

"Father!" whispered Esther, laying her hand upon his arm. "Remember, father! For Letty's sake!"

The old man sat down, buried his face in his hands, and shortly left the cave. As Esther did not mention the subject again, Walter Bligh forbore to question her concerning it.

Walter's appetite was so good, and he so thrived upon mountain air and mountain fare, that he was soon strong enough to walk out and view the region into which a good or evil fortune had thrown him. Esther Arnott accompanied him on his first walk.

He had known that the cavern was situated in the side of a mountain; but he was not prepared for the scene that met his wondering gaze as he emerged from his retreat. Immediately in front of him was a small and level plateau, covered with gramma grass, and interspersed with clumps of pine and cedar, one of many such with which the sides of the rocky range were furnished. Behind him rose cliff upon cliff, thickly covered with pine and cedar, terminating in a lofty and snow-crowned peak, whose summit could be seen far above the fleecy clouds. Beyond the plateau, the mountains shelved down to the plain below, where a shining river could be seen, tumbling over rocks, and creeping through great gorges, until at last it was lost in the boundless prairie that stretched away toward the east and south.

His guide led him slowly, and by easy paths, down the mountain side, until they reached a cañon through which the river passed, shut in by rocky and rugged walls. She halted at a pleasant glade, in which was a little meadow, and pointed at a flat white rock near the stream. Walter went to it, and saw water issuing out of a little basin in the top of the rock, boiling and hissing as if let loose from a soda fountain.

"Drink," said Esther, handing him a tin cup which she had brought from the cave. "You never tasted any thing like it."

Walter did drink, and it seemed as if he could not get enough. Never, indeed, had he tasted any thing so refreshing as this cool and effervescent liquid which appeared to put new life into his veins.

"This must be the place of which I have often heard," he said. "Is it not called the Soda Spring, or the Boiling Spring?"

"Yes; this is Fontaine-qui-bouille."

"And that lofty mountain yonder must be Pike's Peak."

"It is. Is this not a beautiful place?"

"Most beautiful; but it is dangerous ground. See these

bits of wampum in the spring, and the pieces of cloth and other articles that are scattered about. Are they not Indian sign?"

"They are. When the Arapahos go on the war-trail, they make offerings to the Great Spirit, here at the spring. They have been here lately, as you see; but they do not trouble us. They call father the Medicine Wolf, and they respect him highly."

"This is a perfect paradise for hunters, and it is no wonder that your father remains here, if he can have peace with the Indians. I would be glad to live here, or anywhere with you; but I must soon leave you. I have sworn to be revenged, and I will be."

"'Vengeance is mine, and I will repay,' saith the Lord," said Esther, in her gentlest tone, and with her sunniest smile.

"Then the Lord ought to help me; for there was never a more righteous vengeance than mine."

"I will say nothing to hinder you; but I have one favor to ask of you."

"You could ask nothing that I would not gladly grant."

"You will find those men, wherever they may hide, and you will execute your will upon them. I know that you will, if your life is spared, and I believe, with you, that you will live to do it. I only ask that you will not kill them as you meet them. That would be a poor and pitiful vengeance. Bring them here, and they shall be safely kept, until you can dispose of them all at once."

"But how shall I bring them, and how will they be kept?"

"Depend upon it, a way will be opened. Will you bring them? At least will you come here again?"

"Whatever may happen, I will come here again, and that shortly, if I live. I must see you again, Esther; for I love you. I can not tell you how much I love you; but my heart is all yours, and I can never forget you."

"Are you sure? Perhaps you may be tried some time, and we will know how much you love me. But we must not talk of that now. Let it be as if it had not been said. Have you noticed how gray my father is?"

"I have. Why do you ask?"

"And yet he is a fine-looking man, I think."

"He is really handsome, notwithstanding his years."

"If you were as gray as he is, what would you think of yourself?"

"I should think, I suppose, that I carried an old head upon young shoulders. Why have you brought up the subject, and why do you ask such a question. Do you think that I am likely to become gray?"

"I do not, indeed. Come with me."

Esther Arnott led the young man down to the river, where, in a little nook among the rocks, the water was clear and quiet, and told him to look over. He did so, and started back in astonishment, if not in affright. The hair of his head was gray—nearly white—while that of his beard remained black.

"I told you that you were not likely to become gray," said Esther, with a smile, "because you are gray already."

Walter Bligh then knew what he had suffered, and he registered a fresh vow of vengeance.

"If I had known this," he said. "I would not have dared to speak to you of love."

"I should love you none the less for your gray hairs; but I thought you ought to know how much you were changed. Let us return. I have already tired you too much."

When Walter made known to Mr. Arnott his determination to leave and go in search of his enemies, the old man took him aside, and sat down with him under the shadow of a cliff.

"I have one favor to ask of you, Mr. Bligh," he said. "My daughter has already mentioned it. Will you bring those men here when you find them?"

"How can it be done? It seems impossible to me."

"Ways and means can be provided. I would not expect you to act without help. The Arapahos are devoted to me, the Comanches are my friends, and among the Navahos I am well known. In either of those tribes you may command as I would, and you will be obeyed. As for the aid of the whites," continued the old man, with a sneer, "you know that it can be bought with money and that I can furnish."

"It will not be necessary," interposed Walter. "The robbers did not take all I had. I have still a small fortune in St. Louis."

"But it is not here. I will give you gold, and that includes every thing. You can repay me at your leisure, if you wish to."

"How will those men be kept, and what will be done with them here?"

"Follow me and you will see."

The old man led the way along the cliff to another cavern much more extensive and intricate than that in which he had made his abode. He penetrated its recesses with his companion, until they reached a dark stream that flowed in a subterranean channel there in the bowels of the mountain. After the lapse of an hour they came out, Walter Bligh looking astonished and bewildered.

"You have seen," said Mr. Arnott. "Could any thing be better? Here they can work out their punishment. Are you satisfied?"

"I am. I will do as you say."

CHAPTER IV.

NUMBER ONE.

NEAR the close of a day in the month of September, a traveler was journeying over one of the plains in the province of Chihuahua, in Mexico. The traveler was a young man, and was quite a noticeable personage in that country, being a *guëro*, as the Mexicans call a man with fair hair and complexion. His hair, in fact, was of a brilliant auburn, such as envious persons might have called red, and his flowing beard was of the same color. The *guëro*, during his journey through Chihuahua, had been much admired by the fair sex, and had been the object of attentions which were sometimes quite annoying to him.

He was well dressed, but not in the American style, and

wore a pair of light, gold-rimmed spectacles, which gave him the appearance of a wandering tourist or naturalist. The horse which he rode was a fine one, and was richly caparisoned, besides being furnished with capacious saddle-bags. Nearly at his side, but a little in the rear, rode a mozo, or Mexican man-servant, who was "got up" in all the glitter and gorgeousness peculiar to his tribe.

The plain was exceedingly monotonous, being covered with the ugly mesquite bushes, through which the traveler had been passing for many miles; but before him rose the rugged and lofty ranges of the Sierra Madre, presenting, in their tree-covered sides and snowy summits, a refreshing contrast to the barren and shadeless region below.

"Give your horse the spur, José, and let us ride forward," said the traveler, suiting the action to the word. "I am sick of this tiresome mesquite country. Is there not a rancho yonder, at the foot of the mountain?"

"Yes, señor: and a fine one it is, too. That is the rancho of Señor Yarco."

"Señor Yarco. It is a strange name."

"And he is a strange man. Some people call him Señor Porco; but they are very careful not to give him that name where he can hear them; for he is very fierce, a great brute of a man, and would make nothing of chopping off half a dozen heads in a fit of anger."

"He is not a Mexican, then?"

"Your worship has guessed it. He is a North American, one of the Yanquies—may they all die!—but very rich, so rich that he rolls in gold and silver, they say. It is not long since he purchased that rancho; but he has many peons, and the people are all afraid of him. Even the Indians fear to molest him."

"We will call upon him, and will ask him for food and lodging to-night. His countrymen are hospitable, after their fashion."

"You had better not, señor. He will abuse you if he is in a bad humor. If he is in a good humor, he will be glad to have you drink with him, and he will make you drunk."

"I am not afraid of him. Spur up, José."

After a brisk ride they reached the rancho, a stout stone building, with a flat roof, surrounded by a high stone wall. There was a sentinel upon the roof, who espied the strangers, and gave the alarm, which was followed by a commotion within the wall.

As the travelers rode up, the rough voice of the proprietor could be heard, calling his domestics, and cursing them for not opening the gate.

"Git forrud, ye lazy rascals ! Ye're wuss'n a gang o' Mississippi deck-hands. Open the gate, and be durned to yer ordinary hides ! Don't ye see it's a gentleman a-comin' ? Ride in, stranger, and light down. I'm 'nation glad to see ye, and no mistake."

The traveler rode in and alighted, with a hasty glance at Señor Yarco, and at the hacienda and its surroundings. The grinning face and drunken attitude of the proprietor showed that he was in a good-humored stage of inebriety, and the grounds within the inclosure spoke of the taste, as well as the expense, that had once been lavished upon them. But the house wore a dilapidated look, the fine shade trees had been neglected, and the lawns and walks were overgrown with weeds and choked up with rubbish.

"I say ag'in, that I'm 'nation glad to see ye, stranger !" exclaimed the proprietor, seizing the traveler's hand, and squeezing it roughly. "It's as welcome as ice in August, to git a sight of a white man's face, arter seein' nothin' but these dirty greasers fur months and months. Ye kin jest make yerself at home in Bob Yark's ranch, and make free with every thin' in it. Here, Sanchez ! Peté ! take keer of the stranger's hoss, and see that he is well fed and fixed. Walk in, sir. Walk in."

The traveler walked up on the verandah, took a seat, and, in reply to the questions of his host, introduced himself as Henry Burton, stating that he was traveling for pleasure and information.

"Glad to know ye," said the proprietor, again squeezing his hand. "My handle is Bob Yark, though the greasers call me Señor Yarco, 'cause of not knowin' any better. I'm from old Missouri, and I'm all hoss, I am, 'ceptin' what's alligator and grizzly. Are ye from the States?"

"I have lately traveled through them; but I am not an American. I am an Englishman."

"I've allers been kinder ag'inst the Britishers, though they never did me no harm, and I've seed one or two good ones on the plains; but I reckon I like a Britisher better than a Yankee, as I've heern tell they are powerful mean critters. And so ye're jest goin' about fur fun. Wal, I've had enough of that, though this yer ranch gits mighty lonesome sometimes. Reckon ye must be thirsty as well as hungry, and I've jest got in some of the best Paso aguardiente, strong enough to crack a niggur's skull. I've got a lot of the Paso wine, too, that may suit yer taste better'n the brandy. Suppose we take a pull at it, while the niggurs are gettin' supper."

At Yark's command, a peon brought out a decanter and some bottles and glasses, and he helped himself liberally to the aguardiente, while his guest preferred the wine of El Paso. Supper was soon announced, and they sat down to a table loaded with good and substantial fare. At the foot of the table sat a Mexican woman, young, handsome, and showily dressed, to whom the Missourian did not introduce his guest. This oversight, however, arose from ill-breeding, rather than from intention, as he evidently expected Mr. Burton to converse with her as freely as if they had always been acquainted. As for the woman, she, like other Mejicanas, was attracted by the guëro, and cast upon him glances that showed her interest.

After supper, telling the woman to send liquor and wine after him, Yark led Mr. Burton down a slope in the rear of the house, to a summer-house on the bank of a clear and beautiful stream that flowed through the grounds, where they seated themselves to smoke. A peon came to them, bringing liquors and glasses, followed by the woman, who seemed desirous of remaining, probably to see more of the handsome fair-haired stranger, but was rudely ordered back to the house by the proprietor.

"That is my squaw," said Yark. "Ain't she purty?"

"Very pretty. Do you say that she is your wife?"

"Wal, sorter so, and sorter not. She is my squaw, anyhow. When I git tired of her, I've got money enough to buy another; but she's a good gal, and I mean to stick to her so long as she does the fa'r thing."

"You seem to be well fixed here, as they say in the States. This is a beautiful place, although it is sadly neglected. If it was properly cared for it would be a paradise."

"I never play with dice, mister, though I reckon I kin handle the keards about as well as any mountain man."

"I was saying that this is a very fine place. It must have cost you a great deal of money."

"Well, it does look that way; but it didn't cost me much. The greaser who owned it was skeered off by the Injins, and I got it mighty cheap. Jest my dog luck, ye see."

"Do the Indians never trouble you?"

"Not they. It wouldn't be healthy fur 'em. The red niggers know Bob Yark, and they're afeard to come inside the range of his rifle."

"I suppose you mean to remain here during the rest of your life?"

"That's about the notion, stranger. P'raps it mought be the healthiest place this coon could find. Ye see—in p'int of fact, I don't know but I mought as well tell ye of a little trick I did, bein' as ye ain't from the States, and it ain't likely to git back thar."

"I assure you that any secret with which you may trust me will be well kept."

"Hain't a doubt of it," replied Yark, who had been pouring down the brandy of El Paso, until he had reached the very confidential stage of intoxication. "It looks kinder queer to you—don't it, now?—to see a man of my stripe so well fixed here, owning a ranche, with lots of niggers and things on it."

"It does, I must admit. Trappers and hunters are seldom saving of their gains."

"Jest so. Here's one that never laid by a cent, until I come across this lucky streak. Thar war five of us—not countin' a boy—who had set in fur a trip to Santa Fé and back, with a young chap from St. Louey. Thar war a fine chance of goods in the train, along with a good pile of money, and we made it up among us to set him afoot on the perrera, and divide the property among ourselves. We did that thar little thing, stranger, and a pile we made out of it, shore. We

took the wagons on to Santa Fé, and found the market thar col'abul dull; so we went on to Chihuahua. We happened thar jest in a good time, as the greasers war crazy fur what we had, and Sim Leonard—he was the boss of the job—sold out the truck fur five or six times the valley of it. What a speculation that young chap would hev made, ef we had let him go through! Sim divided out the money like an honest man, and we found ourselves purty well sot up all around. My sheer—though you wouldn't hev thought it, to look at the train—was more'n ten thousand dollars."

"That was worth the trouble and the risk."

"It was that, stranger, and the trouble was little, and the resk nothin'. I had laid out to go on a big spree, and it's likely that the monté-dealers and the wimmin would hev got my sheer; but I happened to hear of this ranche, and I put the biggest part of my pile into it right away. I reckon I did a good thing, stranger."

"You did, indeed. You played the young man what the Yankees would call a smart trick. What became of him, think you? Perhaps he died on the prairie."

"Reckon he stood a mighty good chance to go under thar. In p'int of fact, I don't see how he could hev missed it, as we didn't leave him even a knife, and game was power-al sca'ce."

"Perhaps, again, he may have survived, and he may yet hunt you up and take revenge upon you."

"'Taint likely that he lived to git fur. Ef he did, he would hev a fine time huntin' fur this coon. I ain't a bit afeard of that, stranger."

"And yet, I have heard of instances where men have lived through worse trials, and have waited for years, but have had their revenge at last."

This last observation appeared to disconcert Señor Yarco so much, that it required another glass of El Paso brandy to steady his nerves.

"You have spoken of a boy, whom you did not count," suggested the Englishman. "Did he get a share of the plunder?"

"Mi-ighty little, I reckon," hiccupped Yark.

"Perhaps he did not join you in the plot?"

"We had to ske-er him. Durn my hindsights, stranger, ef you don't look a heap like that young St. Louey chap! Ef it wasn't fur your red ha'r and baird, I'd e'ena'most sw'ar it was the same man. What makes ye look so queer? Reckon I'm gittin' drunk."

It was not necessary that the old trapper should say that he was getting drunk. Nearly drunk when his visitor arrived, his joy at the arrival, and the excitement attending the relation of the manner in which he acquired his property, had been such that he had swilled an unusual amount of El Paso brandy, and had become scarcely able to sit in his chair. Muttering a few incoherent words, his head dropped forward on his knees, his body swayed hither and thither for a few moments, and then he fell from his seat upon the floor of the summer-house, where he lay in a state of senseless intoxication.

With a smile of contempt, Burton touched the body with his foot, and walked up to the hacienda, where he directed some of the peons to go and bring in their master.

Feeling weary after his journey, and perhaps somewhat disgusted at the scene of debauchery which he had witnessed, he signified to the Mexican woman his desire for rest. She, smilingly anxious to please the guñero, showed him to the best room in the house, and ordered the servants to bring him any thing that he might call for.

Whether the Englishman slept well or ill in the mansion of Señor Yarco that night, could not be guessed from his countenance the next morning. He looked, perhaps, a little fresher than when he retired; but there was no other change in him. His host, on the contrary, to judge from his appearance, had passed a sleepless and troubled night. His face was haggard, his eyes were sunken, and he looked several years older than he had looked the previous day. Sundry glasses of brandy were required to steady his nerves, before he could take his seat at the table. During the meal he ate but little, and his eyes wandered wildly around, settling, now and then, with a disturbed and frightened expression, upon the countenance of his guest.

The agitation of his manner, and the lividness of his features, were not to be accounted for by his late drunkenness.

He was too case-hardened to be so greatly affected by a debauch. The truth came out after breakfast, when he resorted to the verandah, to enjoy the company of his guest and a bottle of brandy.

"Tell ye what, stranger," he said, when his spirits had been raised by the brandy sufficiently to allow him to talk. "I've a notion that I must have had a tetch of the horrors last night. I had jest the durnedest dream that this child ever kim across, by long shootin'. What d'ye think?—I woke up of a suddent, it seemed, and thar, right by the side of my bed, was standin' that young St. Louey chap I telled ye about—the same that we sot afoot on the peraira. He was lookin' down at me, dressed as he was when we sot him afoot, and his eyes burned like bloody blue blazes. As soon as I see'd him, he opened his mouth, jest as ef he war alive, and says he:

"'I have lived through it, as I told you I would, and I will live to be revenged on every one of you.'

"I couldn't holler; but I jerked the blanket over my face quicker'n lightnin', and when I looked ag'in, the thing was gone. Do ye reckon it war a dream, stranger, or a shore enough ghost?"

"It was a dream, of course," replied Burton, with a strange smile. "You had been drinking pretty heavily, and you had been talking about him, which naturally brought him into your dreams. There are no such things as ghosts."

"P'raps not; but it skeered me up mighty bad, and I hain't got over it yit. I feel powerful streaked, and this brandy don't 'pear to be a bit stronger'n water. Do ye think it likely, supposin' the young chap mought hev lived, that he would ever come into these parts to hunt me up?"

"Of course not, and it is not at all likely that he lived. Take some more brandy, and forget your bad dreams."

"I wish I could; but them words, cap, were the very last words that I heerd him say when we sot him afoot."

"What is the matter on the roof, Señor Yarco? What are those Mexicans yelling about?"

"Injins! That's what's the matter!" exclaimed Bob Yark, jumping up. "Durned ef I ain't glad of it, fur I'd like a tussle with the red niggurs. I'll git my rifle, and show 'em,

ef they give me a chance, that Bob Yark hain't forgot how to shoot. Wonder ef the gate is fast."

"Never mind the gate," said the Englishman. "I will look to it, while you get your arms."

The trapper hastened to get his rifle, and the Englishman walked out to the wall, where he busied himself about the gate for a few moments, apparently examining its fastenings. He then joined Yark within the house, where the proprietor was dealing out arms and ammunition to his servants. This done, all adjourned to the top of the house, to get a better view of the approaching savages.

On they came from the eastward, fifty or more in number, painted for war and shining with oil, naked to the waist, with their buffalo-robcs thrown over their backs, galloping at full speed, brandishing their lances, and yelling like demons at the sight of the men upon the housetop.

As soon as they came within range, Bob Yark opened upon them with his rifle, and his example was followed by the Englishman and the Mexican servants. Only one fell, however. The Mexicans all shot too high, and Burton's bullet went—perhaps he knew where. The Indians rode straight on toward the gate.

"Shoot higher, you dirty greasers!" angrily exclaimed Yark. "The red niggurs must be durned fools, ef they thin they kin git over that wall or through it. Let's go down, whar we kin git a better chance at 'em."

The trapper led the way down-stairs, followed by Burton and the servants; but they had hardly reached the yard, when the gate flew open, and in poured the triumphant crowd of savages.

"The gate was left open!" exclaimed Yark. "Thar's su'thin' wrong about here. What does it mean?"

"It means that you are my prisoner," replied Burton, as he jerked the trapper's rifle from his hand, and threw it among the Indians.

"And who are you?"

The Englishman pulled off a red wig and a false beard, disclosing to the affrighted trapper the well-known features of Walter Bligh.

Bob Yark, astonished and stupefied, was unable to offer any

resistance to the Indians, who surrounded him, and bound him hand and foot.

"You see," said the young man, "that I have lived through it, as I told you I would, and I mean to be revenged on every one of you. You are the first, and the others will soon follow."

"It's all right, I reckon," replied the trapper, who was completely sobered. "You've kitched me, and you kin do what you please with me. Thar's only one favor that I've got to ask of ye, cap."

"What is it?"

"The woman in thar—my squaw, as I call her—she's a good creatur' and I should hate to have her harmed by the Injins."

"She shall not be injured. No one here shall be troubled, except yourself."

Bligh went into the house, and brought out the Mexican woman, assuring her that she would not be harmed. She first threw herself upon Yark, and then fell at Walter's feet, imploring him to spare his prisoner.

"He robbed me, and tried to murder me," replied the young man. "For that he must be punished. Remain here, and you will not be harmed; but the Indians will plunder the house."

The savages, in fact, did not attempt to pursue the frightened Mexicans, or to drag them forth from their hiding-places. The chief went into the hacienda with them, to keep them from getting at the liquor, and soon loaded their horses with a miscellaneous assortment of plunder.

Bligh, in the mean time, sought out the servant who had accompanied him to the hacienda, and dismissed him, giving him a gratuity beyond his wages, and directing him to take care of the Mexican woman.

The prisoner was then placed on a horse, and the Indians, with Walter at their head, rode off toward the east, leaving the woman in a swoon on the ground.

CHAPTER V.

PERLA'S LOVER.

ONE of the most pleasant situations near Monterey, on the coast of California, was that of the rancho called La Encinada, the abode of Señor Miguel Peréa and his family.

Señor Peréa was a Californian of advanced ideas, who had fought under General Castro against Mexico, when Santa Anna sent Torrejon with an army of bandits to "subdue" the province. After the conquest of California by the United States, he was both glad and proud to enrol himself as an American citizen, and rejoiced that his country had a government that was stable and liberal.

Possessed of as much wealth as he desired, Senor Peréa was content to remain upon his estate, and devote himself to his family, which consisted of his wife and a son and a daughter.

Perla Peréa, the daughter, was a dark-eyed beauty of seventeen, too fair a flower to bloom unnoticed in that seclusion, although La Encinada was but a few miles distant from Monterey. Perla considered it a seclusion; for she did not find such society as she could have wished, and eligible young gentlemen, in particular, were rather scarce in that region. It is true that swarms of beaux came out from Monterey to visit her, whenever they were permitted to do so, and that she was the belle at all the festas in town and all the gatherings in the neighborhood; but this did not satisfy Señorita Perla. The Californian young men were not to her taste; she tired of them all, and she was quite disgusted with young male humanity, until—

Until, after California had changed owners, and after the discovery of gold had brought multitudes of strangers into the country, she met a young man from the United States, with whom she fell desperately in love. As it was impossible for any young man to know Perla Peréa without loving her

her affection was ardently returned, and she and her lover were happy.

They would have been happy, might be said more truthfully, if the course of true love, which never yet ran smoothly, had not been particularly intricate in their case. The truth was, that Charlie Simbell—for that was the name of Perla's lover—was a poor young gentleman, who had happened to become acquainted with her by meeting her at a festa in the neighborhood. Not only was he poor, but he had no friends who might claim acquaintance with the Peréa family, and his connections, as far as they were known, were bad. In fact, nothing was known of him, except that he had been traveling in the company of a noted gambler, and that was enough to induce Señor Peréa, when it became evident that the young man was endeavoring to pay his addresses to Perla, to forbid him the house, and to command his daughter to hold no further communication with him.

The young lady, however, was inclined to disobedience in this respect. Notwithstanding the parental edict, the lovers frequently met, told over the oft-repeated story of their love, and bewailed the sad fate that appeared to prevent their union.

One bright afternoon, while the parents of Perla believed that she had gone to visit a sick child at a neighboring rancho, she was walking the beach of the Pacific, hand in hand with Charlie Simbell, and their talk was then, as it always had been, of themselves and their love.

"It is useless for us to hope, Perlita mia," said the young American, with a sigh. "We can not long continue these clandestine meetings without being discovered, and when we are discovered, your father will send you away, and then I shall never see you again. I sometimes wish that I had never seen and loved you, as then both of us would have been spared the misery of loving without hope."

"Do not speak so, Charlie," entreated Perla. "You make me miserable, and I wish to be happy when I am with you. I can be happy while I am in your company, whatever may happen to us hereafter. If my father should send me away, I would still be true to you, and we would find some way of making known our thoughts and feelings to each other."

"Are you sure of that, Perla? Would you really be true to me, through months, or through years, if you should not see me in a long time?"

"I would. I swear it by all I hold sacred. But why should we speak of fears of the future? Is there nothing we can do at present to brighten our prospects? Have you no friends in this country—none who can recommend you or vouch for you? My father is not a hard man, and he is anxious to make me happy. He would not ask for riches, as he has enough. If he could be made certain that you are such a man as he would wish for his son-in-law, he would be satisfied. You were seen in the company of that man Leonard, who is known to be a gambler, and my father is afraid that you are of the same class."

"But I am not. I have only lately come into this country, and it is my misfortune that I came with that man; but I am not in any way connected with him in his business. I am an orphan, without family and without friends. I had a friend—a gentleman who educated me, and who intended to bring me up as a trader; but he is dead."

A cloud passed over the young man's face as he spoke these words, and the next instant he started as if he had been shot.

A stranger had suddenly appeared before the young couple. They had been so absorbed in themselves, that they had looked neither to the right nor to the left, and he had ridden up to them unawares.

The stranger was a tall and finely formed man, evidently an American, who might have been counted young, had it not been for his white hair, and his flowing gray beard. A pair of gold spectacles, also, spoke of more advanced age than would have been inferred from his fresh complexion and unwrinkled cheeks. He was well dressed and well mounted, with pistols in his belt, and with saddle-bags over his saddle.

"Can you direct me to Señor Peréa's?" asked the stranger, as he reined in his horse, and bowed low to Perla and her companion.

"It is but a short distance from here," replied Simbell. "You turn to the left near the rock yonder, and you will see the hacienda before you."

"Thank you," said the stranger, as he bowed again, and rode off in the direction indicated.

"What is the matter, Charlie?" asked Perla, observing that her lover's cheeks were of the hue of ashes, and that his eyes followed the stranger, with a wondering and frightened expression, until he was out of sight. "Do you know that man?"

"Was there really a man here?" replied Simbell, passing his hand across his eyes. "Are you sure it was a living man, Perla?"

"What do you mean? Why do you speak so strangely? There was a man here, of course, and you spoke to him. Had you ever seen him before?"

"If I have not seen him before, I have seen a ghost to-day. But no. Why am I so childish? The thing is impossible."

"What is impossible?"

"Do you remember, Perla, that I was speaking just now of a friend I once had—a gentleman who educated me, and who is dead?"

"Yes. Did this stranger resemble him?"

"If it was not for his white hair and beard, and his spectacles, I would swear that he was Walter Bligh himself. But this was an old man. Was he not old, Perla?"

"His face was young; but he could not have been young, of course. Are you sure that your friend died?"

"How could it be otherwise? He could not have lived."

"Did you see him die? Tell me all about it."

"I can not, Perla. It is a secret."

"Have you secrets from me, then? I thought you had confided every thing to me. If you do not tell me this, Charlie, I can trust you no more."

"I ought not to; but yet—it does not concern me. I did nothing wrong. This Mr. Bligh, Perla, was crossing the plains, with a caravan of goods for the Mexican market. The train was a valuable one, and it carried, besides the goods, a considerable amount of money. There were seven of us, in all, and the chief man, under Mr. Bligh, was that Leonard of whom you have heard. On the way, Leonard and another made a plot to murder Mr. Bligh and divide his property."

They easily persuaded the other men to join them, but could not persuade me. That did not trouble them, however, as I was a mere boy, and they frightened me into silence, threatening me with death if I should reveal a word. It would have been useless for me to do so, as they could have carried out their plot in spite of Mr. Bligh and me, and I must confess that I was afraid. They did carry out their plot, and took the train to Chihuahua, where they sold the goods, and divided the money among themselves; but I had no hand in it, Perla, and I received nothing from them."

"Did they kill your friend?"

"It was worse than killing. They left him alone on the prairie, in the midst of a desert, without provisions, without a gun or weapon of any kind. He must have died of starvation—there can be no doubt of that. He said to us, as the train was leaving him, that he would live through it, and that he would live to be revenged on every one of us; but he could not have lived."

"It was a horrible thing. It makes me shudder to think of it."

"Did I do wrong, Perla? Do you think I was to blame?"

"No, Charlie. You could have done nothing to prevent it; but it must be a terrible memory to you, and I pity you. I will go to the hacienda, and will see this man, who bears such a resemblance to your dead friend. I will learn who and what he is, and will meet you on the beach to-morrow evening, when I will tell you all about him."

The lovers separated until the next day, when they met again upon the beach, and Perla came to her lover with a shining face, and with eyes full of joy.

"You must have heard some good news, Perlita mia," said Simbell, as he ran to meet her.

"I have, Charlie—the very best of news. The stranger whom you saw yesterday is not Mr. Bligh, and he is not a ghost or any kind of a bugbear, but a very nice old gentleman indeed. His name is Gershom, and he is from the United States, and he is a wealthy man, and he brought letters to my father from his bankers in San Francisco."

"That is very pleasant, no doubt; but I have not yet seen any cause for your great joy."

"He knows you, Charlie—that is, he knew your parents long ago, and he has spoken many a good word for you. The way it happened was this: he spoke to my father of having met us here in the road—this was before I reached home, you know—and the good Señor Peréa was terribly angry; until the stranger heard your name mentioned, and then he told all about you. He said that you came of a very respectable family in St. Louis, that your father had been unfortunate in business, and that you had been left an orphan. He declared that your character was excellent, and he further said that if my father objected to you on the score of fortune, he would be glad, from the respect he had for the memory of your parents, to settle an estate upon you. Did you ever hear any thing like it, Charlie? It sounds like a fairy story, and this Mr. Gershom is the good fairy who comes in just at the right time, and gives everybody every thing."

"It sounds too much like a fairy tale," replied the young man, rather gloomily. "I hope it is all true. I hope there is no mistake about it; but I have a strange apprehension Perla, that I can not account for. I am afraid that there is greater trouble in store for us than we have yet known."

"How can you speak so? What is the matter with you Charlie? I thought to make you happy, but you make me miserable by your forebodings. There is no cause for fear. You are troubled only because you think the news too good to be true. I heard it with my own ears, and there can be no mistake about it. Mr. Gershom is stopping at the Mission Delores, and he wishes you to meet him there to-morrow morning. He staid at the hacienda last night, and went to the Mission this morning. Will you go, and hear for yourself?"

"Yes, Perla; I will go, and I will try to rid myself of my forebodings, which are doubtless very foolish."

The next morning, mounted upon a good horse, Charlie Simbell rode toward the Mission Delores, which was situated a few miles from the coast. Strive as he would, he had not been able to cast off the evil forebodings which had troubled him the previous day, and at times he hesitated, as if doubting whether he ought not to turn back. But he had promised Perla that he would go, and he went on, ashamed of his fears but unable to conquer them.

He had passed over not much more than half the distance, when he was startled by the sudden appearance of the stranger, who rode up before him as if he had dropped from the sky or arisen from the ground.

"Good morning, sir," said he. "Is this Mr. Charles Simbell?"

"Yes, sir. Your name is Gershom, I believe."

"I am so called. Were you on your way to the Mission?"

"I was."

"I have been taking a morning ride, and I am glad that I have met you. But what is the matter with you? You are very pale, and you look at me so strangely. Is there anything extraordinary in my appearance?"

"You remind me of a man I once knew," replied Simbell, casting down his eyes.

"Indeed! Who was he?"

"His name was Bligh—Walter Bligh, of St. Louis."

"I have heard of him, and, indeed, I had a slight acquaintance with him. He was quite a promising young man. He was lost on the plains, I believe—he and all his party—and they were supposed to have been murdered by the Indians."

"Yes, sir; he was lost on the plains. He died there."

"Were you well acquainted with him?"

"He was my best friend. He was very kind to me. But, if you will excuse me, sir, I would rather drop the subject."

"I am sorry that it is so painful to you, as I would like to hear something more concerning young Bligh. Did any of his party escape?"

"I was one of them, and I escaped."

"You surprise me. I can hardly let you off from telling me what you know on the subject."

"It would be very painful to me to do so; but Señorita Peréa tells me that you have promised to befriend me."

"I have desired to do so, for the sake of your parents, and especially for your mother's sake."

"I ought to try to please you, then, and to confide in you. Besides, my part in the matter is no secret. I was sworn to secrecy, but it was under compulsion."

After a little pressing by Mr. Gershom, the young man told the story, substantially as he had told it to Perla Peréa.

When he had finished, his companion rode on for a few moments, in silence, with bowed head.

"Do you think I was to blame, sir?" asked Simbell, at last, in some anxiety.

"That is a question which you must settle with your own conscience. Do you think your friend would have died for you?"

"He had risked his life to save mine," uneasily replied Simbell.

"And you risked nothing for him. It seems to me—but it may be too romantic a view to take of the matter, and you may laugh at it in a man of my age—it seems to me that I would have risked every thing for such a friend. Are you sure that he died?"

"He could not have lived. It nearly drives me crazy to think of the suffering that he must have endured, before death came to his relief."

"Enough, I should think, to turn his hair as white as mine."

"What! What do you mean?" exclaimed Simbell, turning an amazed and frightened look upon his companion. "Who are you?"

"I am called Albert Gershoni. I have heard of men who have been made gray-headed by great trouble or suffering. Perhaps Walter Bligh did not die? Perhaps he lived through it, and lived to be revenged upon every one of you?"

"My God!" exclaimed the young man, dropping his rein, while his face was blanched by terror, and his limbs trembled so that he could hardly sit upon his horse. "Those were the last words I heard him use. Am I dreaming, or am I going crazy? There must be an end of this."

"Let it be ended," said his companion, in a changed tone, as he removed his spectacles, and turned his face full to the young man. "You know me well, Charlie Simbell, in spite of my white hairs. You can judge of the suffering that turned them white. But I lived through it, as I told you I would, and I have lived to be revenged on every one of you."

"Not on me, Mr. Bligh!" implored the young man. "Not on me! I did nothing."

"That is true. You did nothing. The murder—worse

than murder—of the friend who had risked his life for you, was plotted within your knowledge, and the plot was carried out before your eyes; but you did nothing. I am not to be balked of my revenge. You are the second; but the others will soon follow.”

Struck by a new thought, the young man drew a pistol from his belt; but it fell from his numbed hand, as his companion struck him on the wrist with his riding-whip. At a whistle from Bligh, two dark-featured men sprung out into the road, and seized upon the disarmed victim.

In a few moments Simbell, with his arms tied behind his back, was led away by the two men, Walter Bligh keeping a little distance in the rear.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WAR-PATH SECRET.

“I SAY, naow, Mister Medicine, what's your other name? There was a doctor once, in Philadelphia, I think, whose name was Physic; but I calkilate that Medicine ain't the name yew was christened by.”

“You are right. I am called the Medicine Wolf by the Indians, and the name has clung to me for so long a time, that I would not know myself by any other.”

“Yew've got another name, then?”

“I once had another name; but it matters not now what it was.”

“Yew ain't ashamed of it, I hope?”

“I hope not.”

“Wal, fur my part, I'm allus open and above board, and allus go by my own name, though I hain't got nothin' to say ag'inst such as chews to dew different. My name is Timothy Taplin, and I hail from the State of Connecticut, and I'm a tradin'-man by nater and by eddication and by profession, and I'm in a bad fix aout here. I'm mighty glad that yew happened along, Mister Medicine, as I calkilate that yew kin give me jest the advice that I'm needin'.”

This conversation occurred in a small and rude shanty, situated on the Sandy Fork of the Arkansas, far beyond the limits of civilization, and within the region claimed by the warlike Arapahos. The shanty, which had evidently been occupied as a trading-post, showed signs of a recent and by no means friendly visitation of the Indians. Broken boxes and torn bales were scattered about, empty barrels and kegs lay here and there, the shelves were nearly stripped of their contents, and the wildest confusion reigned among the dilapidated remnants, in the midst of which sat the proprietor, with a rueful countenance, dismally surveying the desolation.

The proprietor was Timothy Taplin, who has been already introduced to our readers. His companion was an old man, gray-haired, bronzed and weather-beaten, but still of an erect and commanding figure, with a dignified and melancholy expression of countenance. He wore deer-skin leggings, a calico hunting-shirt, and an Indian head-dress. Around his neck were hung a collar of bears' claws, a large silver medal, and a richly ornamented pipe-holder. His bullet-pouch was embroidered with stained porcupine quills, and his powder-horn was adorned with strange and fanciful devices.

"You must first tell me what has happened to you, and exactly how it happened," said the old man. "I may then be able to advise you how to avoid a similar disaster."

"Darned if yew don't talk jest like a skewlmaster or a parson. It's 'nation strange that a man with the skewlin' yew must have had, ever come tew live aout here among these bloody savages. Haow did it happen, anyhaow?"

"Has that question any thing to do with your business? It seems to me that you are neglecting your own affairs, to inquire into mine."

"Wal, I don't know but it may look that way; but I jest wanted tew know, yew see. Hope yew ain't mad, nor nothin'."

"I am not angry; but I have no time to waste in idle talk. If you wish me to advise you, I am ready to hear what you have to say about your troubles."

"It was seven or eight months ago, Mister Medicine, that I came aout onto the Platte to trade with the Injins. I did well at fust, and made money putty lively; but there was

tew many traders in that range, and they kinder run me off. I met a friendly 'Rapaho one day, who told me that there was a good openin' daown here, and said that the Injins would treat me well; so I packed up and come along, though I didn't like the idea of goin' quite so fur aout. But my old dad allus told me that the only way to git along was to reach further and run faster for a dime than any other man would, and that's what I try tew dew. He brought me up, yew see, tew believe in the Gospill and in makin' money, and I've stuck tew the doctrine."

"Too many words."

"Think so? My old dad allus said that talk was cheap. Wal, I stuck my stakes here, and went tew tradin'. I did right well, tew, 'long with the 'Rapahos, and found aout that the Injin had told me the truth. They were peaceable enough, except when they got a little tew much whisky aboard, and then I allus smoothed it over with 'em somehow. But one day there come along an old chief who was called Cut Nose Dew yew know him?"

"Yes."

"Is he a 'Rapaho?"

"He is, and he is not. He and his band are outcasts from that and other tribes, and they are a very bad set."

"I calkilate they are. He got putty drunk, and he said that he was a great chief, that his people had lots of buffalo-robies and beaver-skins, and that he meant to bring them all here to trade with me. Shewer enough, the very next day they come, and the hull village settled daown right here, and a dirtier and a wuss smellin' set never got under my eyes and nose. But the way they give up the robes and tuk daown the whisky was a caution tew traders. They all got crazy drunk, and abused their women, and run 'em off into the woods, and then they yelled and fit and kerried on all night in the awfullest way."

"You had the robes, and they had the whisky."

"Adzackly; and that's what made the raow. The next day they wanted more whisky, and I wouldn't give it to 'em without the robes, and they didn't have any more robes, and they all got tew feelin' mighty blew. At last the old chief come tew me, and begun tew complain. He said that his

people had hunted a long time fur the buffalo-robcs, and the women had worked hard to dress 'em, and they had given 'em all tew me, and had got nothin' fur 'em but fire-water. The fire-water, he said, had made his people mad, and had made 'em abuse their women and fight with each other, and every thin' they had was gone, and they couln't git any paowder tew hunt with or tew fight their enemies with, and nothin' was left but pain."

"He thought that you were partly to blame, I suppose."

"Calkilate he did. I told him that I didn't see haow he could expect me tew dew any thin' abaout it; that I wasn't tew blame a bit; that it was all fair tradin'; that I had sold his people the whisky at the reg'lar price, and as good an article as they could git from any other trader; and that I didn't obleege 'em tew buy it or tew drink it. If they would give me back my whisky, I said, I would give 'em back their robes, and then they could buy as much paowder as they wanted tew. I reckon it must have riled old Cut Nose to think that he couldn't give back the whisky; fur he kep' on gittin' madder and madder, until, bein' afeard that he might make trouble, I offered him a string of beads and a lookin'-glass. The old scamp threw 'em right in my face, turned araound, and raised a yell that yew might have heerd a mile off. The Injins crowded up to him, and he made 'em a roarin' speech in In-jin. When he was threw, they all raised a yell together, and made a rush fur the shanty. I run and got into a cute little hidin'-place, and they went threw the hull consarn quicker'n greased lightnin'. They turned every thin' upside daown and inside aout, in jest no time at all. When I crawled aout, I saw that they had killed my clerk, kerried off the robes they had sold me, and helped theirselves to jest abaout half the goods. The next day another lot of Injins come along—some 'Rapahos, who had allus traded peaceable enough afore—and they cleaned aout the rest of the things. That's the hull story, Mr. Medicine, told as short as I kin tell it, and naow I would be obleeged tew yew if yew will tell me what I ort to dew."

"Do you think you did right, to take all the property of the Indians, and give them nothing but a cheap poison in return? Was it right in you to make such an enormous profit, while they received nothing but ruin?"

"Yew hain't never been a parson, have yew, Mister Medicine? I traded fair and they knew what they were dewin'. A man must get a livin', and tradin' is as honest a way of dewin' it as any, and ther' ain't any law that I know of ag'in tradin'."

"I know that it would be useless to argue that point with you. For my part, if I should give a man something that would make him mad, I think I ought not to complain if he should happen to bite me. But you wish to know what you are to do to prevent another disaster. Is there any thing to hinder you from leaving the country?"

"Wal, yaas, consid'able. I've got a big pile of goods comin', and I'm expectin' 'em every day. It wouldn't dew tew leave 'em tew the Injins."

"I suppose not. There is only one course left. You might have humored the Indians, and gained their favor, by making them some suitable presents, which would have been no loss to you; but it is too late for that now, and there is only one course left to you."

"What's that?"

"If you wish to save yourself and your property, you must join the Arapahos—become one of them—enter yourself as a warrior."

"Whew! Fightin' is a thing I never did take a notion tew, and Injin fightin' least of all."

"It would not be necessary for you to fight. You would become a warrior in name, but not in reality, and you need not go upon the war-path unless you should choose to do so. If you should join the Arapahos, you would not be harmed. On the contrary, they would protect you against all enemies, and would trade with you in preference to any other white man."

"That's jest the ticket, Mister Medicine. Haow is the thing to be done?"

"I will propose you as a candidate, and then, if you are accepted, you will be initiated into the war-path secret."

"And what is the war-path secret?"

"As it is a secret, I can not tell you."

"Dew they hurt a feller, or any thin' of that kind?"

"You will not be harmed in any way, nor is there any thing degrading about it."

"I'll dew it, mister, as soon it kin be done, and much obleeged tew yew."

"Very well. As soon as the ceremony can be performed. I will send a young chief to you. If an Indian comes and tells you that he is Tall Pine, and that he was sent by the Medicine Wolf, you must follow him, and must do as he bids you. Good morning."

The old man shouldered his rifle, and walked away, leaving Timothy Taplin joyful in the hope of saving the property which he was expecting, and of reclaiming that which had been taken from him.

The next evening a young warrior made his appearance at the shanty, mounted, and leading a horse, and, after some delay on the part of the proprietor, was admitted. He announced himself as Tall Pine, sent by the Medicine Wolf, and directed the Yankee to accompany him without delay.

Taplin was very anxious to ask questions, in order to gain some information concerning the ceremony that he was to go through; but the replies of the young warrior were so short and unsatisfactory, that he soon abandoned the attempt. He mounted the horse that had been brought for him, and followed his guide, who was so silent that even the Yankees' tongue at last became still.

They did not reach their destination that night, but encamped near the head of the Fork, and resumed their journey the next morning. Taplin thought that they were going a long distance, especially as he knew that there was a village of Arapahos within a few miles of his shanty; but he could gain no information upon the subject from his guide.

Nightfall found them among the mountains, which they ascended until they were obliged to dismount and turn their horses loose. They had climbed a cliff, and had reached a small plateau, such as abound in those ranges, when Tall Pine informed his companion that he must be blindfolded. The Yankee demurred to this; but was told that he could go no further unless the operation was performed, and he finally submitted. His guide led him through a rough and tortuous passage, in which he was several times compelled to stoop, and brought him to a stand still in the midst of a crowd, to judge from the confused murmur of voices.

When the bandage was removed from his eyes, he started back in affright, and would have turned to fly, if he could have seen any means of egress. He found himself in a large cavern, in the heart, as it seemed, of the everlasting mountain. In the dark and rugged walls were numerous blazing and smoking torches, which shed a lurid and unearthly light through the gloom, and filled the close air with a resinous odor. Around the apartment, seated upon their haunches, were a number of wolves, as the Yankee at first supposed them to be, and directly in front of him, seated upon a stone, was an enormous gray wolf, holding a spear in his left paw. It was the sight of these monsters that had frightened him; but he soon recovered his equanimity, as he came to the conclusion that they were only Indians dressed in wolf-skins.

"Is this the candidate?" asked the gray wolf, speaking in very good English.

"This," replied Tall Pine, "is the Big Thief."

"Does he wish to become an Arapaho?"

"That's my notion," said the Yankee; "but I'd jest like to know—"

"Cut out his tongue!" roared the gray wolf.

Tall Pine drew his scalping-knife, and the Yankee screamed with terror.

"If he speaks a word," said the gray wolf, "except in answer to such questions as may be put to him, let his tongue be cut. Perhaps he will be more discreet hereafter."

A dozen of the wolves seated themselves in a circle, which Taplin was compelled to join, and the entrails of a buffalo, cleansed and roasted, was brought into the circle. Each of the wolves took hold of the "boudin," showing his Indian thumb and forefinger, and the Yankee was made to hold it in the same manner. The gray wolf then explained to him that this position was a solemn and sacred one, having the force and sanctity of an oath; and that his life would depend upon his giving true answers to all questions that might be propounded to him.

After a few preliminary questions, the gray wolf asked him whether he had a squaw in his own country.

"Jerewshy!" exclaimed the Yankee. "I don't know that that's any of your business. I cain't dew any hurt, though,

tew tell yew that I kinder have. I married a gal daown aour way—Jerewshy Wilkins—but we were gittin' along 'nation slow, and I come away and left her to shift for herself."

"You deserted her?"

"Wal, I 'spect I kinder did, and I wish I hadn't done it. She was a good gal, and I dew wish that I was back tew her ag'in."

"What was the worst deed you ever committed?"

"Yew seem tew take it fur sartin that I've done su'thin' mighty mean, and all of us have, I calkilate. If I'd knowed that yew were goin' on in this way, I wouldn't hev come. Who knows but you want tew tell on me, and git me intew a scrape?"

"As you have been told, your life depends upon giving true answers. You have gone too far to draw back now. None of your secrets shall be disclosed. Answer at once, and answer truly."

"Wal, as it's understood that it won't go any further, and as it was a white man that I helped tew play the trick onto, I don't see any harm in tellin' yew. It was a young feller who was goin' tew Santa Fé with some wagons full of goods, and there was some money in 'em, tew. There was five of us along, not countin' a boy, and we made it up tew set the young feller afoot and divide the plunder. The thing was done, jest so, and we took the train on tew Chihuahua, where we sold aout and divided. I didn't dew any thin' tew the young feller, but—"

A savage growl from all the wolves nearly startled the Yankee out of his senses.

"But you consented to it, and you took your share of the plunder," said the gray wolf. "What became of the young man?"

"I 'spect he died. That was the calkilation. That was abaout the meanest thing I ever did; and it kinder sticks in my crop."

"Is it not possible that he may have lived through it; and lived to be revenged on every one of you?"

"Darned if those ain't the very words he said when we left him alone. Hello! What's that?"

The gray wolf had vanished, and in his place arose a cloud

of smoke, through which Taplin saw a man standing, who wore the dress and showed the well-remembered features of Walter Bligh.

"Cre-a-tion!" exclaimed the Yankee, as he started to his feet, and the wolves in the circle fell back. "If that ain't the very man, or his ghost!"

"It is no ghost," said the man behind the smoke, as he stepped forward. "I am Walter Bligh. I have lived through it, as I told you I would, and I have lived to be revenged upon every one of you. You are the third; but the others will soon follow. Take him away!"

"The wolf-skins were thrown off, and half a dozen warriors, with hideous yells, rushed upon the Yankee. They seized and bound him, and, in spite of his entreaties, screams and struggles, carried him down through a narrow passage, further and deeper into the mountain.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHE-EAGLE.

SACRAMENTO, like San Francisco, was emphatically a fast town. It sprung into existence in an hour. It "rose like an exhalation." At first it was a congeries of tents and shanties; but the tents and shanties were filled with wealth, and in them was transacted the business of merchant palaces. Soon framed buildings, and even buildings of brick, began to take the places of the tenements of canvas and boards, and order and beauty grew up out of confusion and uncouthness.

One of the finest of the frame buildings, situated on a corner of the principal street, served a double purpose, each purpose being bad. The lower portion was what was called, in the language of the day, a saloon; but a similar institution, in sober and old-fashioned communities, would be denominated a tippling-house. This, however, was a tippling-house on a grand scale, and therefore it bore the high-sounding name of the El Dorado Saloon. It was furnished in a very tasteful as

well as a very costly manner, and no appliance was neglected that could tempt the eye or the appetite.

The El Dorado Saloon was literally, as well as figuratively, the gate of hell; for there was an entrance through it, as well as at the side, to a gambling-hell on the second floor. The gambling-rooms, also, were expensively and luxuriously furnished. Mirrors and paintings and sofas were there in abundance, and tables were always set, loaded with the choicest viands, for the entertainment of all visitors. But the tables at which the stomach was filled were only baits to draw custom to the tables at which the pocket was emptied. Of these there was a full complement—monté-tables, roulette-tables, and faro-tables—and they were always in operation. Day and night there was no cessation of the rolling of the balls and the shuffling of the cards. At night, especially, the rooms were crowded, and the tables were covered with gold in all varieties, from the virgin dust as it was washed from the placer, to solid bars stamped with the assayer's mark, and the octagonal "slugs" that were the fashion in the land of gold.

The owner and manager of the El Dorado Saloon and of the gambling-rooms was Simon Leonard, a man who had made his appearance in California with the first rush of gold-seekers, and who, instead of risking health and life in the laborious and uncertain occupation of digging for gold, had at once started in "business" as a chevalier of fortune. At first he had opened his "little game" in a tent; then a shanty had covered him; then a rough building of planks, with a pretentious front, had accommodated the gladiatorial hordes who came to fight the tiger; and at last he had erected the large and handsome building which was known far and near as the El Dorado.

He was rich, report said, when he came to the land of gold, and it was certain that his gains had increased rapidly during his residence in Sacramento. Games of chance were certainties to him, and he rejoiced in the efforts that were occasionally made to "break his bank." Always liberal, as well as polite and affable, he was lavish in his donations to charitable and religious purposes, and was immensely popular with all classes. If a church was to be built, although the pious trustees would not directly solicit such a man, they gladly pocketed the sums

which he was always ready to subscribe. Some might have looked upon this liberality as an attempt to compromise with conscience; with Sim Leonard it was a means of gaining popularity and a sort of respectability.

There was a faro-table in the principal apartment, at which Leonard presided, when he was not otherwise engaged. Every night he might be seen there, seated in a costly arm-chair, dressed in the height of fashion and in the finest of broadcloth, glittering with diamonds, oiled and perfumed, cheerful and affable under all circumstances, wearing the same pleasant smile, whether the bank won or lost. To see him there, absorbed in his favorite game, one would not suppose that he had a care in the world, or that there ever obtruded upon his dreams or his waking thoughts the vision of a man, bound and helpless, starving to death upon a barren and desolate prairie.

Among the customers of this banker there was a woman. This would not have been a strange sight at a European gambling resort; but it was unusual at that place and time, especially as there were few women in California, and those few were so carefully guarded by their husbands and relatives, that they would seldom venture abroad, much less find their way into such a den.

This woman was richly dressed, and was of a tall and fine figure. No one could look upon her without believing that she was beautiful; but she invariably wore a mask, which concealed the upper portion of her face, with the exception of her eyes, which were large, black, and brilliant to intenseness.

She had visited the rooms regularly, during two weeks. She came punctually at nine o'clock at night, and went away at twelve, never remaining a moment after that hour, whatever might be the condition of the game. She always seated herself directly in front of Leonard, and did not change her position until she rose to depart.

It may be said for her that she was not alone. Her companion was a boy of fifteen, or thereabout, handsome and tall for his age, with dark complexion and piercing black eyes, which were as wild in their expression as those of the untamed mountain eagle. He was such a companion, too, as might be useful in case of danger; for, on one occasion, when there was a probability of a disturbance, and a rude remark

had been addressed to the lady, a cocked pistol appeared in his hand as quick as thought. It was not until she laid her hand upon his arm, and whispered a few words, that he restored the weapon to his breast.

As a gambler, the lady was both careless and successful. She did not seem to play for gain, or even for the excitement of the game. On the contrary, she laid down her money here and there, in a haphazard way, and often took no notice of her losings or winnings, until her attention was called to them. Her mind appeared to be occupied with watching Leonard. Whenever he looked up from dealing or shuffling the cards, he was sure to find her brilliant black eyes fastened upon him.

Sim Leonard was interested in this woman, and soon he was troubled by her. He was anxious to know who she was, but could find no one who was acquainted with her. He was too well accustomed to reading the thoughts of those who frequented his rooms, to believe that she was brought there by the love of play, and many of his minutes were occupied in vain endeavors to guess her motives.

She is a Mexican woman, was his first thought, as he observed the swarthy complexion of the boy, and her own dark and speaking eyes. No American woman would venture into such a public place as this, or would gamble so openly. But this opinion was driven away as soon as she opened her lips. She spoke but little, and when she did, she used pure and excellent English, without the slightest foreign accent. Her voice, too, was deep and powerful, though sweet and melodious.

He was soon troubled by her. He began to believe that she was watching him, and that she came there for that purpose. When this belief had taken possession of him, it made him quite uneasy. It became really painful to him, whenever he looked up from his occupation, to find himself confronted by the inquiring, earnest, searching gaze of those brilliant black eyes. It disconcerted him; it caused him to make frequent mistakes, which were unusual and very vexatious; it robbed him of his cheerful smile, and gave him an anxious and troubled look.

This was not to be endured. As her nightly visits con-

tinued, it grew worse, and he determined to put an end to it. He resolved to know more about the woman.

One night, as she was about to leave, at her usual hour, there happened to be but few people in the room, and the doorway was clear. Making a sign to those at the table to remain quiet, he arose and followed her to the door.

"Can I be of any assistance to you?" he asked.

"I need no assistance," she replied, with an air of surprise.

"I hope you will pardon me if I seem to be obtrusive," he went on to say. "You have often favored me with your company at my table; but I have not yet had the pleasure of learning your name."

"Are you sure that it would be a pleasure?"

"It would be a gratification to me, at least."

"I am not in the habit of gratifying idle curiosity. If I win your money, or if you win mine, names will make neither of us the richer or the poorer."

"There is something in your voice that sounds familiar to me. Your eyes are so splendid, that I am sure your face must be beautiful. If you will favor me with a glimpse of it, I will be most thankful for the boon. I assure you that I desire to say nothing disrespectful. Only raise your mask for a moment."

"For a moment? Very well, sir. Look your best; for the moment will be a brief one."

Turning her piercing glance full upon Leonard, she lifted the mask from her face, and immediately replaced it. The gambler started, and turned pale.

"Are you satisfied?" she asked.

"I suppose I must be, though your moment was very brief. I thank you. Your face, as well as your voice, reminds me of a lady whom I once knew."

"Not of one whom you once loved, I hope."

"Yes; of one whom I once loved—whom I still love."

"I hope you were true to her," said the woman, in a harsher and shriller tone, as she bowed, and descended the stairs.

Leonard returned to the table, and resumed his occupation; but a spell was upon him. He was so nervous and fidgety, and made so many mistakes, that he soon lost his temper.

Calling to an assistant to take his place, he left the room, and went to his lodgings.

He passed a troubled and sleepless night. The voice of the woman, and the slight glimpse of her face, brought to him visions of a happy Ohio home—visions of a beautiful girl, with black and brilliant eyes, who had fondly and blindly trusted in him. Through his slumbers, which were not sleep—through the dreams which crowded his fitful dozes—arose that face which had been revealed to him but a moment, strangely connecting itself with the face of long ago, and all the night rung in his ears the accusing tones of that reproachful voice, repeating “I hope you were true to her. I hope you were true to her.”

In the morning he felt weary and jaded, and could not rid himself of the thought of the woman. He resolved that he would set a spy on her track, who would follow her the next time she left the gambling-room, and find out who and what she was.

He might have saved himself the trouble; for the woman never came to the El Dorado again. The morning after he spoke to her, she left Sacramento, and, with the boy as her only companion, set out on a journey of a thousand miles. Both were well mounted and armed, and they rode as if they knew where they were going, as if the route had no terrors for them, as if they were able to take care of themselves.

Any one who could have accompanied them would soon have perceived that they were well able to take care of themselves. Down through California they went, in a south-easterly direction, by the traveled route, and not one of the many rude and lawless men whom they met on the way offered to molest them. When they were not near any settlement, as was often the case, the boy killed game for their food, and they dressed, cooked and ate it, in hunters' style, and with the appetite of hunters.

When they reached the point where the Coast Range and the Sierra Nevada unite, they struck across to the Mohave river, which they followed to the Colorado. They then took a north-easterly course, following Indian trails, until they crossed the Colorado Chiquito, and entered the country of the Navahos.

During their journey from the Colorado, they passed through the territories of several Indian tribes, some of whom were friendly, as they met and entertained the travelers, and others were hostile, judging from the pains which the wayfarers took to avoid them. But they had no hostile encounter on all the route, nor any serious molestation; nor did they suffer considerably from hunger or thirst. These two, without doubt, were accustomed to the wilderness and to taking care of themselves.

Once in the country of the Navahos, they were not long in reaching an immense plateau, in the center of which was a smaller plateau, lofty and apparently level, the milky quartz of which it was formed presenting a wall that could not be scaled. This lofty plateau was covered with houses, some of which were quite imposing in appearance, and which shone in the morning sun like silver.

It was a city in the wilderness, and the woman and the youth greeted it as if they were approaching their home, though the former sighed deeply as her gaze rested on the shining summits of the buildings.

Impossible of access as the town appeared to be, the travelers found a path, winding along the side of the bluff, so narrow and steep that they could not have ascended it if any one had chosen to prevent them.

Thus they entered the city. In the clean and regular streets were many Indians, men, women and children. It was evident that the new-comers were recognized by these, although they uttered no word of recognition. No one spoke to them, and they spoke to no one, but rode in silence to a tall building that stood near the center of the town.

This was the temple, and it was four stories in height, each upper story being a little smaller than the one below it. The travelers ascended to the second story by means of a ladder, leaving their horses below. Soon some Indians came and took charge of the horses, and others collected in front of the building, until the street was filled with an expectant crowd.

After a little while, the woman and the boy showed themselves at the second story; but both were transformed in appearance. She was dressed in a rich robe, embroidered with

strange devices, and on her head was a coronal of gleaming feathers. He was attired in the garb of an Indian warrior, which well became his lithe form and his wild eyes, and in his right hand he held a gleaming spear.

Their appearance was the signal for a general shout of greeting and exultation. Drums were beat, and a song was chanted, in honor of one who was both loved and revered in that strange city.

The woman waved her hand, and silence ensued. A few old men climbed up the ladder to where she was standing, and the most venerable approached her, with a reverential air, and spoke to her.

"The She Eagle has been absent from us a long time."

"I have been among the white men, and have visited their grand pueblos."

"The She Eagle has wings, and flies whither she pleases. We feared that she would not return."

"But I told you that I would return, and I have kept my promise. Nothing is impossible to me. Where is the Gray Head?"

"He went to hunt this morning; but I believe he has returned."

"Let him know that I wish to see him, and leave me for a while."

The old men descended the ladder, followed by the boy, and the She Eagle retired to an inner apartment, where she was soon joined by a man.

This man was unmistakably white, although attired in the Indian costume. He was young, also; for his cheeks were fresh and unwrinkled, and his beard was black, although his hair was as white as snow. He greeted the woman joyfully, but with a wondering and inquiring air.

"I could hardly believe that you had returned," he said, "until I saw you. It was such a long and dangerous journey, that I could hardly expect you to survive it."

"To me there was no danger. I had no difficulty in going or returning."

"Did you see *him*?"

"I did. He is in Sacramento, and is very prosperous."

"Did he recognize you?"

"I did not give him a chance to; but he said that I reminded him of one whom he once loved."

"Whom he *once* loved?"

"Whom he still loved, he said, and I almost believed him. I planted a thorn in his side, and left him."

"Did he not recognize the boy?"

"How could he? It is so many years."

"Did you accomplish any thing?"

"Nothing at all. When I found myself in that crowded city, among the powerful white men, I felt that I was nothing, and that I could do nothing."

"I will attend to the matter. He shall not remain there many more months."

"It seems impossible that you can do any thing. He is rich and popular. When will you go?"

"Very soon. Just now I have another affair on hand."

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRAP.

"You know this country right well, Bill Beeler?"

"Not what ye mought call right well, my boy; but I've been hyar afore. Reckon I ort to know summat about it, when I come mighty nigh leavin' my ha'r up in these mountings."

"How was that?"

"I war trappin' it on a leetle stream not fur from here, when the Injins laid fur me, and made a grab jest when I wasn't lookin' fur 'em. They gobbled hoss and beaver and all, and would ha' got my sculp, but this child was a leetle too smart fur 'em. I tuck to the water, and crawled inter a holler log, whar I lay fur two days or tharabouts, until they giv' up s'archin' fur me."

"What you do then?"

"Ye kin jest bet yer life that I was powerful hungry when I crawled outer that log. I could ha' eat rattlesnake easy. A mighty hard time I had of it, too, afore I could git anywhar,

without a hoss or any fixin'. But I had my rifle, and I warn't gwine to starve while she was about."

"Much Injin here?"

"'Bundance of 'em, ef ye happen to scar' 'em up, and when they do git scar'd up, they're wuss'n any hornets' nest ye ever kicked over. They're Navahos, ye see, and I don't know any thin' ag'inst 'em in a ginerall way; but they're dead set ag'inst havin' any white men come into thar country. Ef they hear of one bein' about, the hull tribe will be up and arter him, until they kill him or ketch him or drive him away. Nobody knows much about 'em, as I ever heerd on."

Of the parties to this colloquy, one was Bill Beeler, trapper and guide, tall, sinewy and swarthy as ever. The other, whose straight, black hair and olive complexion proclaimed his mixed descent, was Richard Le Breux, the half-breed. Having been thoroughly "cleaned out" at the last rendezvous they had attended, their credit had been good enough to supply them with fresh outfits, and they had started out, "on their own hook," for another season's trapping. They had met at the head-waters of the South Fork of the Platte, in that curious region known as the South Park. Driven thence by the Indians, they had passed over to the sources of the Arkansas and the Rio Grande. Having bad luck in those localities, they had crossed the mountains for the purpose of exploring the small streams that empty into the San Juan.

We find them encamped for the night, in a valley at the base of the mountains, by the side of a clear and beautiful stream. Their supper, composed of antelope's flesh, was cooking on the coals before them; their guns and traps and "possibles" were lying within reach; and their horses, duly picketed, were up to their breasts in the rich grass with which the valley was covered.

"'Spect this a mighty bad place to come to," said the half-breed, as he took a rib from the fire, and began to eat it. "What you come fur?"

"Hope ye ain't afeard, Dick. The Injin ain't born who kin skeer this child. I come because I 'lowed thar mought be a chance to make su'thin' hyarabouts. Beaver ain't wuth much. At a plug a plew, it don't pay to set traps fur 'em; but thar's beaver hyar, ef thar's beaver anywhar."

"Better lose beaver's ha'r, than lose Dick Le Breux's h'ar."

"Ye're right about that, my boy. Ef thar was nothin' but beaver to hunt fur, it wouldn't pay fur the resk. But the boys are diggin' lots of gold in Californy, and it would be a good thing, I reckon, ef we could find some without going quite so fur."

"Ugh! What you mean?"

"I mean to say that ef thar ain't gold in these hyar mountings, and about these hyar rivers, then this child is mighty bad fooled. I've heerd talk of it ag'in and ag'in, and I met an Injin once, who showed me a big lump of gold that he got in this kentry, and he told me whar it come from. I hain't a doubt but old Sam Parks knowed whar the gold was in these parts, and he'd ha' got a pile of it, ef he hadn't been rubbed out. It's been in my mind a long time to come hyar and hunt fur gold; but I had plenty arter we made that trip to Chihuahua."

"What you do with all that money?"

"Do with it! That's a mortal queer question to ax of sech a man as me. What hev I done with the thousands and thousands of dollars I've made in all the years I've been on the plains and in the mountings? Squanderated it—scattered it about—it flew like feathers in a big wind. What did you do with yourn?"

"Whisky, he got some. Injin woman, she got some, too. 'Spect 'most everybody got some."

"You thought it would last furever, I reckon. Wal, I must confess that I've been feelin' kinder streaked about that trick ever sence. I raally wish we hadn't ha' done it. The plunder did me no good, and bad luck has followed me. Ef I could only make a strike about now, and git enough to settle down on, I reckon I'd try to lead an easier life, ef not a better one."

"'Spect when the Injins sot you afoot out here, you felt like Cap. Bligh, when we left him alone on the peraira."

"Don't speak about it, Dick. That was a mean trick, shore; but it was Sim Leonard who put us up to it. Durned ef I'd ha' treated a dog that way, of my own head."

"'Spect he got mighty thin, afore he gin out."

"Don't speak of it, Dick, I say. You make me feel streaked all over. I've dreamed about that scrape enough,

and I don't want to be bothered by it any more. Ye'd better roll up, and I will keep watch fur a while."

The trappers thought that they kept a good watch that night, and doubtless they did; but it was not good enough. It would hardly be possible for two men to be more astonished than they were the next morning, when they went to look for their horses and could not find them. Their traps and packs and "possibles" were safe, having been kept in camp; but all four of the horses were gone. The picket pins had been pulled up, leaving the plain inference that the abstraction had been the work of human hands.

Sorrowful and indignant, the two men returned to camp

"What's your opinion, Dick?" asked Beeler.

"Injins."

"Injins, in coorse; but what Injins?"

"Navahos."

"That's likely, too; but what Navahos?"

"'Spect you know 'em better as I do."

"Hev ye furgot that sneakin' skunk of a red-skin who followed us down the mounting?"

"No."

"There was two of 'em, I've a notion, and what two Injins could be sneakin' on our trail fur, was more'n this child could guess. We ort to hev laid low fur 'em, and rubbed 'em out, afore they got a chance to steal our hosses; though it ain't likely that they've been follerin' us this long while, jest fur the hosses. Hows'ever, the mischief is done now, and all we've got to do is to trail 'em and try to git the critturs back."

"Mighty small chance."

"You're right about that, Dick; but we must git even somehow. Let's cache this plunder."

Concealing their traps and packs, the two trappers set out in pursuit of the robbers. They easily followed the trail, and were not long in discovering that the horses had been taken by two Indians, who had probably mounted two of the horses, and led off the other two.

As Le Breux had said, there was a "mighty small chance" for two white men on foot to overtake two mounted Indians; but it was possible that they might "come up on them," and Beeler was determined to do his best to "get even."

They followed the trail until near night, and perceived, to their surprise, that it was growing "warmer." They had gained upon the robbers, and, in fact, were quite close to them. This fact caused them to move more cautiously, lest the pursued should become startled and hasten their flight.

Their astonishment was still greater when, on entering a deep valley shut in by rugged hills, they saw a smoke before them, and immediately afterward perceived the four missing horses, picketed and grazing near the middle of the valley.

Approaching a little nearer, they discovered two Indians asleep by the fire.

"Ye may shoot me this minute," exclaimed Beeler, "ef I ain't beat now! Those Injins are sartinly the durnedest fools that ever tried to steal hosses. Who in thunder ever heard of the niggurs stoppin' on thar trail, and goin' to sleep that a-way?"

"Let's run down and git thar sculps," suggested Le Breux.

"Not so fast, my boy. I've a notion that we'd better consider a bit. It's a mortal queer thing, to see Injins act that a-way. Ef the hosses was licker, that mought account fur it. It don't look sensible to me, ag'in, that they'd hev follered us as they hev, jest fur the hosses. Supposin', Dick, that they've got a trap fixed fur us down thar, and are jest waitin' fur us to walk into it. Supposin', ag'in, that they ain't Injins at all, but only dummies, and that the trap's thar all the same."

"Mighty easy to find out."

"That's a fact. We'll sneak up and feel of 'em with a bit of lead, and it won't do fur both of us to shoot, eyther. Do you draw a bead on one of 'em, Dick, and I will save my lead fur t'other, ef he rises."

Crawling down within easy gunshot of the fire, the trappers concealed themselves, and Le Breux, taking a good aim, fired at one of the sleeping Indians.

The ball hit the mark, without doubt; but neither of the Indians moved.

"Jest as I 'spected," said Beeler. "They're nothin' but dummies. Now whar's the trap?"

He was answered immediately. A wild yell split the air, and, from behind rocks and trees, and out of clumps of bushes and bunches of grass, arose swarms of warriors, who rushed toward the white men, yelling like fiends.

"We're in fur it now," said Beeler. "The only hope is, to take to the hills. Foller me, Dick."

The trappers ran to the side of the valley, pursued by the screaming horde of savages, and scrambled up the rugged declivity with the agility of goats. They soon reached a narrow ledge, where they determined to make a stand, and, almost breathless as they were, at once commenced to gather together loose pieces of rock, and to make a barricade at the brink of the ledge. The savages halted, on seeing these preparations for defense, and all who were within gunshot took shelter.

"The durned skunks will hardly git to us, up hyar," observed Beeler. "We kin shoot 'em down as fast as they want to climb these rocks."

"Eat 'em, too?" asked the half-breed.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothin' else to eat."

"You're right about that, boy. Nothin' to drink, eyther. Ef they don't go away afore long, our stomachs will be apt to whip us."

The Indians, it was soon evident, had arrived at the same conclusion. Instead of assaulting the ledge, they contented themselves with remaining near it, taking care to shelter themselves well, and firing an occasional shot at the stone barricade. The besieged answered these demonstrations by an occasional shot, until they perceived that they were merely wasting their ammunition, when they ceased firing, and did nothing but observe their antagonists.

"They'll do one of two things now, I reckon," said Beeler. "When night closed down upon the scene. 'They'll eyther make a rush at us afore mornin', or git away and leave us.'"

"Maybe so they won't," dubiously replied his companion.

The two trappers watched all through the night—the one who slept lying down with his rifle in his hand; but they saw not the slightest sign of a demonstration on the part of the savages. There was no change in the positions of the contending parties, nor did there seem to be any prospect of a change, although Beeler declared that he would be durned ef he ever saw Injins act like that afore.

It was the purpose of the Indians, without doubt, to starve their adversaries into submission, after the manner of civilized

nations. Without doubt, also, it would be easy enough for them to accomplish their purpose. During the previous day the trappers had finished the small amount of provisions that they carried upon their persons, and had emptied their gourd canteens of water, and starvation stared them in the face.

No breakfast and no dinner troubled them considerably, and the absence of supper caused them to groan dismally and look at each other despairingly. They had been accustomed, all their lives, to endure great stress of hunger and thirst at times; but on this occasion they were utterly without hope. It seemed certain that they must either perish by starvation, or surrender to their enemies. The latter alternative was the most terrible, as report had told them that the Navahos were in the habit of roasting their captives by a slow fire, as a sacrifice to their deity.

They passed another watchful and weary night, and the morning found their condition changed only for the worse. During a day and two nights they had had nothing to eat or drink, and they were nearly famished. They might hold out for some time without food; they could gnaw their leggings and moccasins; but they could not survive much longer without water.

"We're in a trap, and that's a fact," said Beeler, as he gloomily surveyed the prospect. "Ef we had struck 'most any other place but this hyar ledge, with this mortal tall pile of rock behind it, we mought ha' stood some chance to sneak away. It's jest our luck," he continued, looking up at the inaccessible cliff. "Ef it was any other two fellers but us, they mought spy a sheep climbin' along up thar, jest whar they could shoot it and drap it at the'r feet; but—hello! what's that? Injins above us, Dick, by thunder! They kin jest drap down rocks, and smash what's left of us, as easy as lyin'."

"That's so, too. Su'thin' comin', right now."

It was not a rock, though. A rock would have come dashing and thundering down the cliff; but this descended slowly and quietly, and it was round and smooth in appearance—not at all like a rock. The trappers gazed at it in astonishment, as it came lower and lower, until they discovered

that it was a large, short-necked gourd, and that it was being let down by a bark rope.

They remained speechless until it reached the ledge, and rested quietly before them.

"What in thunder does it mean?" exclaimed Beeler. "It must be some infarnal trick, and I 'spect thar's powder in that gourd."

"Ugh! I smell whisky," replied Le Breux.

"Whisky! That's onpossible."

The half-breed applied his nose to the gourd, and threw up his head as if he sniffed an odor that was particularly pleasant to him.

"Whisky!" he exclaimed. "Plenty good whisky."

"Don't ye drink it, boy!" entreated Beeler, as the half-breed drew the stopper from the gourd. "It's p'isoned, or su'thin's the matter with it, shore."

"Ugh! You reckon I find whisky, and not drink him. 'Spect you crazy."

Le Breux drank, and drank deeply, until Beeler, perceiving that the liquor did not kill his companion, concluded to join him in his potations.

Within an hour they were both lying by the barricade, unable to rise or to speak.

Within another hour a dozen Indians stole up to the ledge, who picked up the drunken men, and carried them down into the valley, where they deposited them on the ground, in the presence of a crowd of silent Navahos, at the head of whom was a woman, attired in a rich robe, and crowned with a circlet of colored feathers.

"Captured," she said, "with the devil's ammunition. Let them be brought to the temple."

When the captives awoke from their drunken stupor, they found themselves in a large and low room, the sight of which, at such a moment, was enough to fill them with horror. It was dimly lighted, and at one end was a stone table, or altar, on which a small fire was burning. In the center was a pyramid of human skulls, and around the walls were shelves filled with similar ornaments. Besides these attractions, grotesque figures, molded in clay, and painted with flaming colors, stood around the room, and stared them in the face.

The two trappers looked at each other, both very much aghast, and wondering whether the scene was a reality or a feverish dream.

"Do ye see those thar things, boy?" asked Beeler, pointing at the pyramid. "Do ye call 'em skulls?"

"Yes," replied Le Breux.

"And those thar red and blue and yaller devils—do ye see them, too?"

"Yes."

"It's all right, then, ef we both see 'em. I was afeard it was the whisky workin' on me. This hyar place is hell, Dick."

"'Spect it is."

A woman entered the room, although no entrance was visible—a woman fine-featured and with brilliant eyes, dressed in a flame-colored robe, crowned with bright feathers, and carrying a spear in her right hand.

"Ef this *is* hell," muttered Beeler, "and ef that thar *is* the devil, he's a much handsomer critter than I've heerd tell on."

"Do you know Walter Bligh?" suddenly asked the woman, in a piercing voice, flashing her black eyes upon the two trappers.

"We did know a man by that name," meekly replied Beeler, when he had partly recovered from his surprise at this unexpected question.

"Where is he?"

"He is dead."

"What killed him?"

"Wal—are we obleeged to tell things jest as they was, down hyar?"

"You must speak the truth, or it will be worse for you."

"The fact is, that some of us tuck his plunder, and left him alone on the peraira. We 'lowed that he'd starved to death."

"Are you not afraid that he may have lived through it, and lived to be revenged upon every one of you?"

"Durned ef these warn't the very last words I heerd him say!"

The woman waved her spear, and another figure entered

the room—a tall and stately figure, completely covered with a robe of white.

Again she waved her spear, and the figure removed the covering from its head. The trappers recognized the features of Walter Bligh; but his hair was as white as snow.

“Do you see this gray hair?” he asked. “You know what turned it gray. I have lived to be revenged upon every one of you. Five have fallen into my power, and the sixth will soon follow.”

Again the woman waved her spear, and a number of Indians entered the room, who seized the captives, bound them, and carried them away.

CHAPTER IX.

NUMBER SIX.

EVERY one knows the rude and chaotic state of society in California shortly after the discovery of gold. Rowdies ruled the land, and crime of all descriptions was rampant. The officers of the law either feared to perform the duties of their positions, or were in league with rogues and outlaws. Disorder reached such an extreme, that a reaction was inevitable. When it came, it was terrible in its effect. When the better class of citizens became aroused, they executed certain and speedy punishment for misdeeds, and gave no quarter to criminals.

Let us step into the head-quarters of a vigilance committee in Sacramento. It is established in one of the parlors of a hotel, and is a very quiet, orderly and gentlemanly assemblage. The men who compose it are some of the most respectable in the city—solid business men, who appreciate the responsibility that has been laid upon them, but are able and willing to uphold it. They are thoroughly in earnest, too, although they may laugh and joke a little now and then. If it is not a matter of life and death with them, it is a matter that nearly concerns the interests of property and business, and they are determined that it shall be successful.

At the head of the table is seated an elderly gentleman, with a broad forehead, a head slightly bald, and a countenance that combines benevolence with firmness. Around the table are seated several others, and they have been listening to a man who sits near one of the windows.

The appearance of this person is singular. His fresh and unwrinkled face, his well-knit and rounded frame, his erect and manly bearing, show plainly that he has not reached the meridian of life; but his hair is as white as if it had been silvered by the frosts of sixty winters. In a word, it is Walter Bligh.

"The man of whom you speak, Mr. Bligh," said the chairman of the committee, "has been under our observation for some time."

"I had supposed," remarked Walter, "that he has been pursuing his avocation, such as it is, very quietly and peaceably."

"He has, and it is only lately that any charge has been made against him. It seems that his gains have not increased rapidly enough to suit him. Seeing the license that prevailed, and the impunity with which crimes of all kinds are committed, he has thought to get rich a little faster. The other night, a man who had just come in from the mines was decoyed into Leonard's place, and was robbed by him and the barkeeper of his saloon, as he says, of about six thousand dollars in dust."

"Have you arrested him?"

"We have tried to do so; but I must confess that we have failed thus far."

"I hope he has not absconded."

"He has not; but he defies us. He is safe enough; but it is very inconvenient to get at him. He has fortified himself, with his barkeeper, in a small room at the head of an entry, to which there is no access except by the entry. He is well armed and supplied with food and drink, and can hold out for some time, until, as he supposes, his friends can get him clear in some way. We might carry this position of his by assault; but it would be certain death to one man, if not to two or three."

"It is inconvenient, as you say."

"Not wishing to lose any valuable lives, we have concluded to guard him where he is."

"If I will capture him, will you give him up to me, and let me carry him off?"

"I see no objection, if you will guarantee that he will leave California and never return."

"I think I can safely promise that much."

"From what I know of your story, I judge that you will keep your promise. You have cause enough, certainly, to punish him to any extent. But I am afraid that you will only lose your life in attempting to take him. He must fall into our hands before long."

"I think I can take him. At all events, I wish to try. I need no assistance, and only ask your permission."

"It is a lawless proceeding; but we are a lawless body, and all our acts are lawless. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies, and we are not afraid of the judgment of the people. If there is no objection from the gentlemen present, you have permission to do as you have proposed."

No objection being made, Walter Bligh wished the committee good-morning, and left the room.

That night he repaired alone to the El Dorado saloon, dressed as he had been when he was left upon the prairie. He wore the same broad-brimmed hat, which, when it was pulled over his eyes, prevented his features from being recognized.

He walked up the stairs that led to the gambling-rooms, and ascended to the third story of the building, where he found the narrow entry that had been described to him. At the end of it was a small room, with the door open, and a light burning within.

Bligh saw no one at first; but, when he reached the head of the stairs, Leonard started up in the door, with a pistol in each hand.

"Don't come any nearer!" exclaimed the gambler. "If you move a step further, I will shoot you down."

"Do you not see that I am alone?" replied Bligh, in measured tones and a hollow voice.

"I don't know about that. Whether you are alone or not,

you had better be off. I had rather die here, than be snatched up and hung by their infernal vigilance committee. My God! that voice and that dress reminds me of—. Who are you? What do you want here? Go away, this minute, or I will fire!"

Leonard stood with his cocked pistol leveled; but his hand trembled, his face was deathly pale, and his eyes seemed ready to start out of their sockets.

"Fire, if you think you can kill the dead!" replied Bligh, removing his hat from his face.

The gambler's pistol arm dropped, and he fell on the floor in a swoon. The barkeeper, who had been watching the strange demeanor of his employer, rushed to his assistance, and Walter Bligh, who sprung forward at the same moment, slipped a pair of handcuffs, as quick as thought, upon Leonard's wrists.

This proceeding caught the eye of the barkeeper, who was at once aroused to resistance. He drew his pistol; but Bligh instantly dashed it from his hand, seized him by the collar, and threw him upon the floor, where he held him in an iron grasp.

"You may go," said Bligh, when he had completely disarmed the young man. "This is the man I want, and I have no occasion for you. You had better leave the city without a moment's delay."

The barkeeper availed himself of this permission, and hastened down-stairs.

Leonard soon came to his senses, and sat up on the floor.

"Am I really a prisoner, and to you?" he asked, fixing upon Bligh a stare of surprise and terror. "Are you really alive, or what are you?"

"I am Walter Bligh, as you see. I have changed somewhat since you last saw me, and you know the cause of the suffering that turned my hair so gray. I lived through it, as I told you I would, and I have lived to be revenged upon every one of you. You are the sixth and last, and you must follow the others."

"What do you mean to do with me?"

"You will see."

"Will you give me time to settle up my business?"

"Did you give *me* time? Get up sir, and follow me."

Walter Bligh led the way down-stairs, meekly followed by his captive. At the door they were met by a guard from the vigilance committee, who had the barkeeper of the El Dorado in custody. Leonard was placed upon a horse, and five of the guard accompanied Bligh and his prisoner to a house a few miles distant from the city, where they were joined by a handsome, dark-eyed lad of fifteen.

After eating breakfast at this house, the guard returned to Sacramento, and Bligh packed his horse, as if for a long journey. He then set out toward the south, with Leonard and the lad. The prisoner was not bound; but Bligh and the lad, both well armed, rode upon either side of him.

"You seem to be prepared for a journey," said Leonard, when they had traveled a short distance. "Will you tell me to what place you mean to take me?"

"You will find out in time," replied Bligh.

"Who is this boy? I am sure that I have seen him before."

"I believe you have. He is called the Bounding Elk. You should see him in his Navaho home. He does not appear to advantage in the costume of civilization."

"Did that woman tell you where to find me?"

"What woman?"

"The woman who visited my rooms in Sacramento with that boy."

"It was I who told her where to find you."

"Who is she? Is the boy her son?"

"He is. The Bounding Elk is the son of the She Eagle."

"They are both Indians, then? It is very strange. I would give my life, if it was mine now to give, to know who she is. I had a glimpse of her face, and it reminded me of—some one I once knew. Shall I see her again?"

"You may have a chance to renew her acquaintance."

All the attempts of Leonard, to gain from either of his conductors some information concerning the place to which he was to be taken, or the fate that was in store for him, were alike fruitless, and he finally relapsed into silence on the subject.

For many days the journey continued, without intermission or interruption. The prisoner was never bound ; but he well knew that he was carefully watched and guarded. If Walter Bligh slept at night, the Bounding Elk was on guard at the camp ; if the Bounding Elk went to shoot game, Walter Bligh remained to watch the prisoner. Leonard knew that he might as well attempt to escape the vengeful arm of the man whom he had so foully wronged, as the unerring rifle or sharp tomahawk of the Indian boy. All this time he had abundant opportunity to speculate upon the fate that awaited him, as well as to puzzle his brain concerning this boy, whose features strangely reminded him of some one whom he had once known, and concerning the mysterious woman who had visited him in Sacramento. His ill-gotten gains had vanished ; his life, even, could no longer be called his own ; but it would be a great satisfaction to him, whatever might happen, to learn who and what those people were.

The route taken by the travelers was identical with that which had been pursued by the woman and the boy when they left Sacramento. They followed the usual route, in a south-easterly direction down through California, striking over to the Mohave and thence to the Colorado, which they crossed, as they reached it a little before night, and encamped on the other side.

At this encampment a project occurred to Sim Leonard. He had discovered in his vest-pocket a small quantity of morphine, which he had been in the habit of using, in small doses, for the purpose of producing sleep. His avocation had been such, that he was obliged to take his "cat naps" as he could get them. When he laid down to rest, it was necessary that he should make the most of his time, and, as sleep would not readily come at the moment, he was compelled to resort to artificial means of inducing it.

There was not enough of the morphine to kill. If there had been, Leonard would not have used the whole quantity. He could not again attempt the life of Walter Bligh, and there was something about the Indian boy that kept him from harm at the hands of Sim Leonard. There was enough, however, to send both into a deep sleep, and he determined to put them in that condition. The travelers made coffee every

morning and evening, and it was easy, therefore, to carry his design into effect. He wished that he had discovered the morphine sooner, before he had got so far away from the settlements; but it was not yet too late to attempt to escape. If he should be unable to make his way to a settlement, he could at least keep the trail, where he would be very likely to fall in with parties of emigrants.

As he was always allowed to go about the camp as he pleased, and as he usually assisted in the culinary operations, he had no difficulty in slipping the morphine into the coffee. He did not drink any of the beverage, refusing it, as he had often done, because it kept him awake at night; but he had the satisfaction of seeing his guards partake of the coffee freely. They complained, at first, that it had a bitter taste; but a little sugar soon remedied that defect.

As it was Walter Bligh's turn to mount guard, he took his station, with his rifle in his hand, and Leonard and the Bounding Elk laid down to sleep. The former, who kept his eyes open, soon perceived that the boy was sound asleep, and then Walter Bligh, after in vain struggling against the drowsy influence, sunk upon the grass, and was landed in the realm of Morpheus.

Without a moment's delay, Leonard selected Bligh's rifle and pistols, as being the best, picked out the swiftest saddle-horse, loaded a pack-horse with provision, and started back toward the Colorado.

The sleep of Walter Bligh and the Bounding Elk was both deep and long. The boy, as he had drunk the least of the coffee, was the first to wake; but the sun was up when he opened his eyes. Not perceiving the prisoner near him, he looked for Walter, and saw him lying on the grass. He called him, but received no answer. He went to him, and was obliged to shake him roughly before he could arouse him from his slumber.

"What does this mean?" asked Bligh, as he rubbed his eyes. "I must have been sleeping here all night. It is very strange."

"I have just woke up," replied the Bounding Elk, "and I was asleep as soon as I touched the ground. What does it mean? I believe the white man is gone."

"Gone! No doubt you are right. Of course he is gone. If he is, I can guess what was the matter. Let us look."

Bligh searched the encampment, and discovered that his arms had been taken. He then observed that two of the horses were missing, and there was but one conclusion at which he could arrive.

"He is gone," he said, "and it was he who put us to sleep. You remember that the coffee tasted bitter last night."

"Yes."

"He must have had laudanum with him or some preparation of opium, which he put in the coffee. My head feels as if I had been drinking opium."

"What shall we do now?"

"He has taken the back track of course, and we must pursue him. He has the best horse; but that is no matter, as his pack animal will delay him."

"But he is armed now, and we can not take him. Shall I shoot him if I see him?"

"By no means. You would commit a great crime if you should kill him."

"What do you mean?"

Walter bent his head, and whispered in the boy's ear.

"Is that true?" exclaimed the Bounding Elk, with a start.

"It must be true. Your mother told it to me."

"But we must follow him. Perhaps he may fall into the hands of the Mohaves."

"And what then?"

"They will eat him."

"Do the Mohaves eat white men?"

"I have been told that they do."

"We will follow him as fast as we can; but we had better eat our breakfast before we start."

CHAPTER X.

THE MOHAVES.

WALTER BLIGH cooked and ate his breakfast quite deliberately. He had no doubt that he would be able to overtake the fugitive; but he was considering how he should capture him, in the event of overtaking him. Having settled this point as well as he could, he mounted with the Bounding Elk, and set out toward the Colorado.

When they reached the river, they discovered that it was useless to proceed any further in that direction, as there were marks of a fracas at the bank. The ground was torn and trampled, and in one place was stained with blood. The tracks of the horses, too, showed that they had gone up the river, instead of crossing.

"Mohave!" ejaculated the boy, after a careful examination of the "sign."

"Have they killed him?"

"No. It is likely that he has killed a Mohave, or wounded one."

"Why did they not trouble our camp?"

"They knew nothing about it, I suppose. They just happened to come across the—the other man. He has killed one of them, and now they will roast him, unless we can get him out of their hands."

"We must follow their trail, and do what we can to save him."

"Yes; but we must not go too fast. They will do nothing with him before to-morrow morning. To-night they will consult their medicine, and that will tell them to roast him in the morning. We must keep behind them until they camp for the night, and then we may be able to do something. If you were armed, our chances would be much better."

Walter Bligh and the Bounding Elk started on the trail of the Mohaves, which led them northward along the bank of

the river. As it was plain enough, and easy to follow, they rode quite briskly until noon, when, as the boy thought that it was getting too "warm," they concluded to halt and rest themselves and their horses.

They followed the trail more slowly and carefully during the evening, until it led them into a chain of mountains, through which the river had forced its way. As the day closed, they came up with the Mohaves, who had encamped in a deep hollow in the hills. As it was too late to pursue them into this retreat, or even to make an examination of it, they were compelled to defer all further operations until morning.

As soon as it was light enough, they proceeded to reconnoiter the position of the Mohaves, and found it to be a small but deep ravine, nearly circular in shape, surrounded by perpendicular cliffs, which seemed to render access impossible. But it was evident that there must be some way of reaching the bottom of this hole in the hills, as the Mohaves were there, and as it was traversed by a small stream of water.

While the men above were discussing this point, the Indians below appeared to be preparing for some solemn ceremony. They were about twenty in number, and were unusually tall and well-formed. After making a fire, they brought out a white man from a hole in the rocks, and laid him on the ground near the brook. The white man was Sim Leonard, nearly naked, with his hands and feet bound.

A gray-haired Indian, who wore a strangely-figured robe, and carried a long and bright knife in his hand, approached the captive. He held up his hands and his head, and spoke a few words, as if uttering an incantation. Bligh and the boy were near enough to hear what was said, although they could not understand the language.

"That is their medicine-man," said the Bounding Elk. "He has been saying his prayer, and now he means to kill the white man. But I will stop him very quick."

The hollow in which the Mohaves were concealed was somewhat in the shape of a bowl; but the sides were irregular and shelving in places, so that the general contour was that of the bowl turned bottom upward. The medicine-man

was standing but a short distance from where Bligh and the boy were concealed, and a line drawn from the edge of the cliff would have touched him just back of the neck, as he stooped to sharpen his knife.

Before Walter could guess at what the boy meant to do, the Bounding Elk was at the point just over the head of the old man, with a heavy stone in his hands. He poised the stone at the edge of the cliff, and, as the medicine-man was rising to his feet, dropped it upon him.

The effect upon the medicine-man was, to crush him to the earth, a senseless and shattered mass, scattering his blood and bits of flesh and bone in all directions. The effect upon the other Indians was, to terrify them to such a degree, that they all sent up a screech of horror, and looked toward the sky in dismay. They could have no doubt that the stone had been sent by an evil spirit, as no mortal could kill their medicine-man. As for Leonard, he rose to a sitting posture, wiped off with his elbow the drops of blood that had spattered on his face, and looked up at the cliff. His eyes brightened, as he saw the face of the Bounding Elk, who was peering over the edge.

The Indians huddled together in a corner, and held a consultation. Bligh hoped that their superstitious minds would consider the death of the medicine-man a supernatural interposition in favor of the prisoner, and that they would refrain from doing him further harm; but it soon appeared that their indignation was only the stronger against Leonard, as being in league with the evil spirit that had cast the stone.

A man with a tomahawk in his hand stepped out of the throng, and advanced toward the prisoner. Standing there, he made a brief harangue, flourishing his tomahawk, and pointing energetically at Leonard, who was still seated on the ground, bound and helpless. When he had finished, he turned toward the captive, and there was murder in his eye as he raised his tomahawk.

But the Bounding Elk was too quick for him. This warrior could not have been hit by dropping a stone from above, and it was not deemed expedient to fire a shot; but the boy was at no loss for a means of attack. Measuring the distance with a glance of his eye, he jumped from the cliff, striking

the warrior on the head, crushing him down, and breaking his neck, or his back, or both. The jump was a long one, and the boy "glanced off" from his contact with the warrior, to the side of the hollow; but he recovered his footing before the Indians could recover from their consternation.

Walter Bligh, surprised by this sudden movement, looked down after his young friend, supposing that he must have been killed or badly injured; but he saw him standing erect and defiant by the side of Leonard, with his rifle in one hand, and his tomahawk in the other.

"Dogs! and sons of dogs!" exclaimed the boy, "I will teach you what it is to steal a prisoner of the Navahos!"

With this, he bent down, cut the bonds of the captive, and put a tomahawk in his hand.

The Indians, seeing one of their warriors killed, and seeing how it had been done, could easily guess by what means the medicine-man had been disposed of, and their wrath was kindled against the daring boy who stood before them so defiantly. They did not understand the language in which he had spoken, and they doubtless supposed him, notwithstanding his dark complexion, to be a white, and a companion of the man whom they had captured.

They were not to be outdone by a beardless boy, nor would they suffer the death of their medicine-man and a warrior to go unavenged. After a brief deliberation, they rushed upon him.

The rifle of the Bounding Elk sent a ball through the heart of one of the Mohaves, and he sounded the Navaho war-whoop as his enemy fell. But it was his last shot. Before Leonard, who was unskilled in managing the tomahawk, could use his weapon, both were seized and bound by the Mohaves.

Walter Bligh, who had been viewing the scene from the edge of the cliff above, and who, weaponless and out of reach, was unable to aid his young friend, supposed that they were both about to be slaughtered, and did not know what to do in their behalf.

He was about to shout, to distract the attention of the savages from their victims, when he was startled by the clattering of hoofs, which came up the hills, from the direction of

the river. Turning, he saw about fifty warriors, in the Navaho paint, scampering up the ascent, and at their head was riding—yes, there was no mistaking those flashing eyes and that head-dress of brilliant feathers—the She Eagle.

He hastened to meet them, and was greeted with exclamations of joy and surprise.

"What are you doing here?" he hurriedly asked. "How do you happen to be here?"

"These warriors have been on an expedition," replied the She Eagle. "Whether they have hunted for buffalo, or scalps, or what not, does not signify. I accompanied them, and brought them in this direction, hoping that we might fall in with you. But what are *you* doing here? Where is my boy?"

"Our prisoner escaped from us, night before last, and was captured by a band of Mohaves, who have him in a glen near by. The Bounding Elk, in trying to save his life, was also taken. I am afraid that they will both be killed, before help can reach them."

"We saw your trail, and we followed it, to find out what it was. How many Mohaves are in the band?"

"Scarcely twenty."

"We can easily overcome them, then."

"Yes; if you can get at them. But they were very angry, and I am afraid that they may kill both of their prisoners at any moment."

"They had best not. Nocuno, let them hear from us."

The chief who was riding near her sounded the Navaho war-whoop, and his example was imitated by the rest of the party.

"They will do nothing now," said the She Eagle, "until they find out what that means. Lead us to them, Gray Head."

Walter Bligh led the way to the deep glen, and saw that the Mohaves were where he had left them. They were looking up and around them, as if wondering what strange Indians had come into their territory. Leonard and the Bounding Elk were among them, bound, but uninjured. The Navahos dismounted, and awaited the orders of their chief and the queen.

"You were right, Gray Head," said the She Eagle, as she looked down into the glen. "There seems to be no way to get at them, and they can easily conceal themselves, where they will be out of the reach of bullets or arrows. We must use strategy here. Nocuno, is there any one among us who can speak their language?"

The chief called a warrior, through whom the She Eagle, showing herself at the edge of the cliff, addressed the Indians in the glen.

"Mohaves, we are people of the Navahos, who have come into your country. The Navahos, as you well know, are a great and powerful nation. Their warriors are never beaten in battle, and never turn their backs upon an enemy. You have a Navaho boy among you, and a white prisoner who belongs to the Navahos. We want them. Our warriors are more than double your number, and we can easily take them from you, if we wish to do so; but we have no desire to anger or trouble you, and we ask you to give them to us peaceably."

"The Navahos may be a great people," replied the chief of the Mohaves; "but we do not know it. We know of no nation greater than the Mohaves. You did well to bring twice our number of warriors, as one Mohave is a match for two Navahos. We are not afraid of them. If we were, we could easily hide from them, and we know that you can not get at us here."

"Come over the hill on the side toward the setting sun," shouted the Bounding Elk. "There is a hole through which the brook runs."

Although the Mohaves did not understand the boy's words, they could guess at his meaning, and a warrior with a tomahawk was placed over him, to force him to keep quiet.

"The white prisoner is ours," continued the Mohave chief. "We found him alone, and we captured him, after he had killed one of our warriors. We did not take him from you, and you have no claim upon him. The boy has killed our medicine-man and a warrior, and we ought to have our revenge. But, if you will come down here alone, we will trade with you for them. Your warriors need not try to come, as we can easily keep them out."

The She Eagle at once consented to this arrangement, although the Navahos endeavored to dissuade her, knowing that the Mohaves only desired to get the Navaho queen into their power. She knew, also, that such was their plan, but believed herself able to defeat it.

Wetting a quantity of powder, she wrapped it in a rag, and concealed it in her robe, and directed twenty warriors, armed with their tomahawks and knives, to follow her at a little distance. Then, obedient to the instructions of the Mohave chief, she descended the rocks on the west side of the ravine, and found there, as the Bounding Elk had said, a hole through which the brook ran into the glen. The Navaho warriors concealed themselves near the entrance, and she went into the glen alone, through an opening that was large enough to admit of the passage of only one person at a time.

The Mohaves could hardly conceal their exultation at seeing her come among them alone. She had foolishly walked into the trap they thought, and they had nothing to do but to keep her. Knowing the mountains as they did, they could easily escape with their captives, and demand such terms of the Navahos as they pleased.

When she commenced to speak of the prisoners, their purpose was evident enough. They at once declared that they would keep the white man at all events, and expressed a willingness to release the boy, only on the immediate payment of a large quantity of powder and lead.

The temper of the She Eagle was fairly roused. She stepped to the fire, waved her hand with a commanding gesture, and threw into the blaze her bag of wet powder, at the same time uttering a cry like that of the loon.

The next instant the glen was filled with smoke, so dense and sulphurous that nothing could be seen, and the Mohaves astonished and nearly suffocated, could do nothing but stand still in their places. Under cover of the smoke, the twenty Navahos, who had been concealed near the mouth of the opening, stole in and surrounded those in the glen, so that near every Mohave was standing a Navaho with his tomahawk in his hand.

When the smoke lifted, the Mohaves perceived with dismay that more than an equal number of their enemies were in

their midst, as Leonard and the Bounding Elk were both loosed and armed. Around the edge of the cliff above them, too, was an array of leveled rifles and arrows on the string.

Among the Navahos in the glen was the warrior who had acted as interpreter, and the She Eagle directed him to speak to the Mohaves for her.

"You thought that you could outwit us," she said; "but you are children, while the Navahos are grown men. We might kill you all; but we will only take those who belong to us, and you will not be harmed, if you do not attempt to resist us."

The Mohave chief ungraciously muttered that she might take what she choose to take, and she led the way out of the glen, followed by the Navaho warriors, among whom were Leonard and the Bounding Elk.

When they reached the place where the remainder of the warriors had been left, all mounted and rode off. Leonard, who had been eagerly watching the She Eagle since he first saw her at the glen, contrived to bring his horse near to her, and uttered one word, in a low and earnest voice:

"Letty!"

He thought she started and trembled; but she rode on as if she had not heard him, and joined the chief and the Bounding Elk at the head of the party, leaving Leonard behind with Walter Bligh.

CHAPTER XI.

PICTURES.

A CAVERN in the mountain side—the same in which Walter Bligh found himself after he had been picked up on the prairie by John Arnott and his daughter Esther.

He was seated in the middle of the apartment, if it could be so called, and was looking ruddy and handsome, in spite of his gray hair. John Arnott, an old man in hunter's costume, was seated near him. A dark-haired youth, with brilliant black eyes, was standing at the opening. Four women,

engaged in sewing, were grouped in front of Bligh and the old man.

Of these women, one was rather small of stature, with a quiet, placid and amiable expression of countenance. Another was tall and queenlike, with dark complexion, and large, flashing eyes. Another had the olive complexion, the soft eyes, and the languishing air of the daughters of Mexico. Another was of fair complexion, with light hair and blue eyes.

"Now for the last act before the curtain falls," said Walter Bligh, rising from his seat. "To-morrow my revenge will be complete. Is all ready, Esther?"

"All will be ready in time," replied Esther Arnott, looking up with a smile and a blush.

"I will leave you, then, for a while. When I return, I will report to you."

The young man left the cavern, walked a short distance along the foot of the cliff that terminated the plateau, and entered another opening in the mountain side, the same opening into which he had been led, a long time previous, by John Arnott.

He traversed this fissure a distance of some three hundred yards, gradually inclining downward, as if into the bowels of the mountain. The passage was dark, irregular and rugged, so low in some places, that he was obliged to crawl upon his hands and knees, and so narrow in others, that he could barely press through; but he worked his way without difficulty, like one who was acquainted with every step of the path.

At the end of the passage, where a tall Indian, armed with a gun and a spear, was standing as if on guard, he came to a rift in the mountain. By some wonderful convulsion of nature, the great mass of rock had been cleft almost to its center, forming a deep and narrow gorge. On each side rose the craggy and precipitous rocks to an immense height, almost shutting out the sunshine, and at the bottom was a small stream of the clearest water, bordered by a little grass and a few bushes. Each end of the gorge, also, was walled up by lofty and rugged precipices. The brook stole in through the rocks at one end, and mysteriously escaped at the other; but there was no visible entrance, except that through which Walter Bligh had come.

In the sides of the gorge were several other fissures, or openings, partly the work of nature, and partly formed by the hands of men, and in front of each was a mass of broken rock. Several armed Indians were standing guard near these openings, and others, nearly naked and without weapons, were carrying buckets of water and baskets of broken rock to a small and rude building that stood near the brook. From the roof of this building issued two pipes, bearing off the smoke and escape steam of a small steam-engine, and within it could be heard the quick and regular thump, thump, thump, of some pounding and crushing machinery.

After a little hesitation, Bligh entered one of the openings, and walked to the end of it, where, by the light of a candle stuck in a cleft, a man was at work with a pickax.

"How are you getting on, Bob Yark?"

"Slow enough, Mr. Bligh. I keep pickin' away, but git nothin' but rock. 'Pears like the shiny stuff has kinder run out."

"Yes. This vein is about exhausted. Would you like to take a short walk with me this morning?"

"Sartin, sir. Glad enough to git out of this hole fur a while."

"If you should think of escaping, I may as well tell you that the Indians here are devoted to me, and that it would be useless to make the attempt."

"You needn't be afeard that I will hev any sech notion. You hain't done nothin' to me but what's right, and you mought do wuss ef you wanted to."

Bligh led the way out of the hole, and Bob Yark followed him down into the ravine. They followed the course of the little stream, until they came to the south end of the rift. Here they climbed the steep and rocky wall, until they reached a small hole through which the sun was shining.

"If you see any people," said the young gentleman, "you must not speak to them."

"Just as you say, sir."

"Stand here, then, and look."

The hill which they had climbed, although high, was not broad, being, in fact, nothing more than a natural wall, or barrier to shut the deep glen out from the rest of the world.

Looking through the hole, and down at the scene that lay before him, Bob Yark saw a most enchanting valley, shut in by high and pine-covered hills. The waters of the brook that sparkled in the rift, after finding their way through the rocky barrier, meandered along the valley, watering the luxuriant grass, and reflecting the leafy branches of beautiful trees.

On a rock beside the stream was seated a woman, combing her dark masses of hair. Her dress was Mexican, and Yark trembled with excitement when he saw her. She threw back her head, showing her olive complexion and lustrous eyes, and the Missourian clutched Walter Bligh's arm.

"Who is she?" he exclaimed. "What does it mean? That is Catarina, who was with me in Chihuahua, when you found me thar, sir. Is it herself, or is it her ghost?"

"Whoever it is, she is surely alive."

"What is she doin' here? How did she git here? She was a wunnerful good critter, and I treated her mean. Ef I could only be with her ag'in, and could live quiet in that thar valley, I shouldn't crave nothin' more on this 'arth."

"Would you marry her?"

"Wouldn't I be glad to?"

"There are other valleys, more beautiful than that. Come."

Walter Bligh led his prisoner back, unresisting and submissive, to the place from which he had taken him.

He then went to another opening, in which a young man was working, like Yark, with a pickax.

"Step here to the light, Charles," he said. "I have something to show you. Read this," he continued, as the young man came forward, spreading before him a paper in the form of a letter.

Charlie Simbell read as follows:

"MR. GERSHOM: I received your kind letter, and was deeply affected by it. If young Simbell has gained the estate that you speak of, or if he has not, he is welcome to my daughter Perla, provided that he will reside with me. It grieves me to say that Perla is actually dying for him. She will hear of no other marriage, and thinks of nothing but her American lover. Send him to me if you wish to save her life.

"Yours with great respect,

"MIGUEL PEREA."

"Why did you show this to me, Mr. Bligh?" asked the

young man, looking up with an agonized and reproachful gaze.

"To let you know what might have been, and to make you feel the penalty of deserting your best friend."

"I have repented of my fault, and have suffered for it."

"I meant that you should."

"If I have not atoned for it, I wish to do so. There is no other hope left to me."

"I have nothing more to say to you at present. You may return to your work."

From another opening Bligh brought out Timothy Taplin, giving him the same caution that he had given the Missourian. Him, also, he caused to climb the cliff at the south end of the ravine, and bade him look through the hole in the rocky wall.

The Yankee saw, seated upon a stone in the valley, a woman, no longer young, but fresh and comely. She had the bright eyes and active appearance of the women of New England, was neatly dressed in pink calico, and was busily engaged in sewing.

"Je-rew-shy!" exclaimed the Yankee, starting back so suddenly that he nearly lost his balance. "If that ain't herself, I never tasted mince pie! But it's her ghost, maybe, or a pictur' that you've been makin' somehow."

"That is a living woman, no doubt," replied Walter Bligh.

"But how the 'nation did my wife git here?"

"Your wife! You never told me that you had a wife."

"But I had one—more shame to me!—as good a woman as ever lived. I ran away and left her, 'cause I wanted to git rich fast, and thought she was in the way. I deserved to be punished for that, if nothin' else. If I was a free man ag'in, and Jerewshy was mine, nothin' would tempt me away from her."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure! I jest know it. But it ain't likely that she would ever forgive me."

"I should think not. Come; let us return."

Bligh led back the Yankee, and brought forth Bill Beeler and Dick Le Breux.

These two men followed him through the natural tunnel by which he had entered the ravine. At the outer end of the passage they found several armed Indians, who accompanied them down the mountain side to the Fontaine-qui-bouille. Here the two trappers, who had been so long pent up in rocks and caves, gazed with delighted eyes upon the hunters' paradise that was spread before them. At the foot of the shelving prairie, covered with excellent grass, the springs bubbled out from the white rocks near the river. From the springs the mountains rose in ridges, covered with pine and cedar, stretching far away toward the north and south; while Pike's Peak, a giant among them, towered up above the clouds, until its summit mingled with the illimitable azure. Mountain sheep climbed among the craggy steeps, buffalo could be seen along the mountain side, and black-tailed deer were quietly feeding among the clumps of pine and cedar.

Walter Bligh led his prisoners to the spring, where they gladly drank the effervescent water, and then took them to an elevation from which the whole beauty of the scene was visible.

"Thunderation!" rapturously exclaimed Beeler. "I know this hyar place well enough, though I've never happened here afore. I've often heerd of it, and allus wanted to see it. This is the B'illin' Spring, Dick."

"It is Fontaine-qui-bouille," replied the half-breed.

"Ef we only mought be free men ag'in, Dick, and mought camp in this hyar spot, with nothin' to bother us, and nothin' to do but hunt, what a life we could lead!"

"Mighty good," chimed in Le Breux, rather sadly.

"We hain't been treated no other way than sech as we deserve; but, ef we only could hang out hyar, this hoss is one who would never ax to leave."

"The Bayou Salado is not far from here," suggested Bligh.

"That's a fact. The best huntin'-ground under the blue! Any Injins?"

"Only the Arapahos, and they are about to remove."

"Jest think of it! Sech a huntin'-ground! Sech a clovery place fur man and hoss, the year through, and no Injins!"

"You can see how happy men might be, if they were willing to be honest. You must go back now."

With lingering looks backward at the hunters' paradise, the two trappers returned to the ravine, and Walter Bligh, entering another hole in the rocks, came out with Sim Leonard, who appeared to be paler and sadder than formerly, as well as older.

He was taken up the rocky wall at the south end of the rift, and was told to look through the hole into the valley below. As he did so, his frame trembled, and he groaned audibly.

Near the little brook was standing a woman, tall, erect, and of queenly carriage, with dark hair and superb black eyes. She was elegantly attired, and held in her hand a miniature, at which she looked, now and then, and pressed it to her lips.

At her side walked a boy, or young man, who was also well dressed, tall and finely formed, with brilliant eyes.

"Letty!" groaned Leonard, in a tone full of anguish and longing. "My own Letty! My dear wife! My lost wife!"

"Do you think you know that lady?" whispered Bligh.

"She is the same who gave me a glimpse of her face in Sacramento, the same who led those Indians when I was rescued from the Mohaves. Surely it can not all be a dream. It is she, and she is living—my wronged and deserted wife!"

"Could you have left such a woman as that, to marry the widow Labrache?"

"How is it possible? But I would have done any thing. The gambling passion was on me, and it carried me away from every thing good and pure. That boy is the same whom I have seen twice before. Is he hers?"

"If you should call him Arthur, he would answer."

"My boy! That was the name of my boy. What a fine young man he is! If I could have her love again, and could live with her in some secluded spot, where the past would be forgotten, how happy we might be yet!"

"Do you think she could forgive you?"

"It is not possible."

"Come. Let us go. This picture troubles you."

"Thank you. I could not tear myself from it, but am glad that you take me away."

So Walter Bligh closed his series of pictures.

CHAPTER XII.

THE REVENGE COMPLETED.

THE next morning the prisoners were all taken out of the rift, under guard of a number of armed Indians, and were led through the passage in the mountain, to the plateau that overlooked the eastern prairies.

Here they were mounted on horses, and were conveyed, still guarded by the Indians, by a rocky route around the Peak, across a beautiful upland park or table, and down the course of a sparkling stream, that emptied into a river. Following the river toward its source, they found themselves, near the close of the day, in a valley of wonderful beauty and fertility, shut in by lofty mountains, and dotted with crystal streams.

Here all dismounted, and the Indians, after picketing the horses in the natural meadow, led the prisoners into a roomy log-house, newly built, which was situated upon a pleasant eminence.

In the house they found a table set, loaded with a great variety of well-cooked game and fish, of which they were invited to partake.

When they had satisfied their hunger, two men and a woman entered the room, and seated themselves. One of the men was Walter Bligh, conspicuous by his youthful countenance and his gray hair. The other man and the woman were John Arnott and his daughter Esther.

"This day," said Walter Bligh, rising from his seat, "is the anniversary of the day on which I was left alone in the desert by several men to whom I had intrusted my life and my property. You may not remember the date; but I have reason to remember it well. It would be impossible for me to forget it, while these white hairs force it continually upon my memory. Not satisfied with robbing me, and not merciful enough to kill me, those men sought to doom me to a most horrible death, by setting me afoot upon a barren prairie, with my hands bound, with no provisions to support life, and without

even the smallest weapon for defense or for procuring food. I told them, as they were leaving me, that I would live through it, and that I would live to be revenged upon every one of them. This day will complete my revenge."

All were silent, and the young gentleman continued:

"Robert Yark, you have worked well since you have been in the mountains, and the proceeds of your labor are probably much greater than you would suppose. After deducting the expense for reducing the ore, you have not only paid me what you took from me; but you have a considerable surplus, which I now hand to you."

Bligh placed upon the table a pine box, which he opened, displaying a number of bars of yellow gold.

"You are now at liberty," he continued, "and this is yours, to dispose of as you please. Your rancho in Chihuahua has been sold, at a fair value, and the proceeds are in the hands of Catarina, who will deliver them to you."

Esther stepped to the door, and admitted the Mexican woman, who rushed into the arms of Bob Yark. The Missourian fairly blubbered, and it was some minutes before quiet could be restored sufficiently to enable Bligh to proceed.

"You have told me, Robert Yark, that you wish to marry Catarina."

"I want to marry her right now."

"She has been true to you, has gladly followed you to these mountains, and I have no doubt that she will make you a good wife. There is a chaplain at the Pueblo fort, not far from here, who will marry you as soon as you choose to visit him."

Bligh placed another box on the table.

"Charlie Simbell," he said, "the letter which I showed you, from Señor Peréa, was written in all truth and sincerity, in answer to a statement that I made to him in writing, not long ago. There is nothing to hinder you, now, from complying with your own wishes and those of that excellent man. Perla loves you, and you know how gladly she will greet you. You are not as strong as some men; but you have worked faithfully, and, as you received none of my property, your earnings are all your own. They amount to more than the value of the estate that I mentioned to Señor Peréa, and he will have no objection, on any score, to receiving you as a son-in-

law. You will naturally desire to proceed to California as soon as possible. There is an emigrant train at the Pueblo fort, which will leave for the west in a few days, and which will be a safe convoy for yourself and your property."

Charlie Simbell, with tears in his eyes, was about to reply, when Bligh requested him to be silent, and produced another box.

"Timothy Taplin," said he, "you made haste to get rich, and did not succeed. Patient labor, in my employment, has probably rewarded you better than any other means would have done. After deducting the amount that you took from me, you have a handsome sum left, enough to support you, or to begin the world with again. In addition to this, I must also inform you that your goods, which you were expecting when you were captured, arrived safely, and that your wife, with the help of agents, has been trading with the Indians. She has proved herself an excellent business woman."

"God bless her!" exclaimed the Yankee, while tears gathered in his eyes. "I never knew what Jerewshy was wuth, till I left her. I've got jist one favor to ask of yew, Mr. Bligh. If this here gold is raally mine, I wish yew'd take it and give it tew Jerewshy, and tell her tew keep what she made by tradin'. 'Tain't no more'n her rights, and I know she cain't never forgive me fur leavin' her in sich an unchristian manner."

"That is a matter which I must leave to her decision," replied Bligh, as he looked toward the door.

A bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked little woman stepped in, who stole up to Timothy, took one of his hands in hers, and passed her arm around his neck.

"Is it raally yew, Jerewshy?" sobbed the Yankee. "Yew don't mean tew say that yew furgive me fur runnin' away from yew?"

"I rayther calkilate I do, Timothy."

"Sakes alive! I feel like I could go tew glory right away. How did yew ever happen to git here, Jerewshy?"

"I went tew look fur yew. At St. Louey I heerd of some goods that were goin' tew yew, and I follered 'em. Mr. Bligh faound me, and I've been here ever sence. I'll tell yew all abaout it some time."

When this scene was ended, Walter Bligh lifted two more boxes upon the table.

"William Beeler and Richard Le Breux," he said, "as you came here together, I suppose you will go together. Here are your shares of your earnings, and they ought to be enough to satisfy you. But, if you go to some settlement, and commence gambling and drinking, you will soon lose all."

"Ye don't ketch this child in no sech business," remarked Beeler.

"Nor this hyar ole hoss," echoed Le Breux.

"Ef that thar gold is ourn, Dick," said Beeler, "and if we are free men, I allow that we'd better cache it, and build us a lodge hereabouts. This child wants to stay right hyar."

"And so does this ole hoss," replied the half-breed.

"I am glad that you are agreed upon that point," said Bligh, "as I hope that you will be suited by a proposition that I will shortly make to all of you. Simeon Leonard, as you have not been here as long as the others, and as you happened to have a poor claim to work, there is nothing coming to you here. In fact, you have not mined enough to pay me what you owe me; but I can easily throw off the balance."

"I care nothing for the gold, sir," replied Leonard, "and am only sorry that I have not been able to repay you what I took from you. If I could see my wife and my boy again, I should ask for nothing more."

"Do you think that they would care to see you?"

"I have no reason to suppose that they would."

"You must let me tell you a little story. My sufferings upon the prairie ended in a swoon. In that condition I was picked up by John Arnott and Esther, the father and the sister of your wife, who took me to their cavern in these mountains, and nursed me to life and health. They heard my story, and told me their own. Simeon Leonard had been the cause of their troubles, as well as of mine. His wife, who had been Letty Arnott, could not believe that he had really deserted her, and she had gone from their home to the far west to seek him. In passing over the plains, she was captured by Indians, and all trace of her was lost. John Arnott, accompanied by Esther, went into the wilderness in search of his eldest child. Hearing vague rumors concerning her, he came into this region.